

# Education of Formerly Bonded Children and Youth

## *An Exploration of the Arunthathiyar Caste in Southern India*

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April 2015



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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Universitetet i Oslo

# Abstract

This thesis engages with the issue of debt bondage and analyses the role education can have in integrating formerly bonded child labourers into society. By exploring a particular scheduled caste prone to debt bondage in Tamil Nadu, a state of southern India, the thesis highlights the potentials and limitations education can have for those who are released from debt bondage.

During a two-month fieldwork period, in addition to village visits, observations, informal conversations and visits with government officials, qualitative interviews were held with staff from a local grass-root organization and formerly bonded child labourers who mostly attended colleges. The key findings that emerged pinpoint the way debt bondage is tied to a broader social system that reproduces itself by maintaining the Arunthathiyar within a low social-cultural position by, amongst other things, undercutting their education. The findings also highlight the role education can have in integrating formerly bonded labourers, by assisting them to gradually move out of their low caste position. This includes changing their mentalities, teaching them the official state language and providing skills to engage in the broader labour market.



# Acknowledgements

The undertaking of this thesis and its completion has only been possible thanks to a number of people.

I am extremely grateful to my colleagues and friends at CIE for all their support, feedback and companionship. I am also truly indebted to all those who helped with my stay and fieldwork in India. Special thanks are due in particular to Gladstone for facilitating my stay, Shaun O'Brien and Frank Dan for their relentless work as translators and Reynolds for his kind hospitality. I cannot but express my gratitude to and admiration for the Rural Women's Development Trust and its founder for the work they do with the formerly bonded labourers and for having opened their doors to me.

Above all, I am truly grateful for the support, critiques and insightful feedbacks provided by my co-supervisor Kees van den Bosch and my supervisor, professor Lene Buchert who has, in addition, motivated me to strive for my best at all times.

Lastly, I am thankful for my family's support and patience with me over the past years, to my girlfriend during the final stretch and to God who sustains through successes and failures and is invested in the cause of justice for the vulnerable.





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# List of Abbreviations

CWA	Child Workers in Asia
FC	Forward Caste
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GoI	Government of India
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO	International Labour Organization
NCLP	National Child Labour Project
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OBC	Other Backward Castes
SC	Scheduled Caste
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Primary Education

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Reality of Debt Bondage

Bondage is by no means a thing of the past even though one might be tempted to view it as such. It is considered a safe estimate that around 27 million people today are under modern forms of slavery (Bales, 1995, 2005; Anker, 2004). Of these, 20 million are likely to be in debt bondage (Siddharth, 2012; Upadhyaya, 2004) of whom 5 to 10 million are likely to be children (HRW, 1996; CWA, 2007).

This form of bondage, which plagues for the most part the southern Asian continent, arises from a common practice of a person holding his or a family member's labour as a pledge upon a loan (hence the name debt-bondage) and the historical socio-cultural practices, such as cast-based division of labour that have historically legitimized such practices (Upadhyaya, 2004; Srivastava, 2005). The bonded labourer, whether an adult or a child, for the most part finds him/herself unable to pay the original loan leading to a de facto condition of slavery. This is understood as the lack of freedom in: movement; choosing different forms of employment; bargaining for wages; and accessing markets to purchase or sell goods and services (Bales, 1995, 2005; Anker, 2004; Upadhyaya, 2004). Besides the lack of freedom, bondage also often leads to abusive practices, such as chaining people to their work stations, physical beatings and gender based violence (Siddharth, 2012; HRW, 1996). In addition, the physical damages caused by labour at a young age and at such intensity can render bonded labourers unemployable in general by their thirties. This can lead them to be in the same position as their fathers were: i.e. forced to bond their own children (HRW, 1996; Siddharth, 2012).

Underneath the surface of the credit relationship that leads to this condition are the deeper factors of social exclusion (Upadhyaya, 2004). In India debt bondage does not merely arise due to a credit transaction but, more fundamentally, because of the asymmetrical relationship between those at the margins of society, such as the lowest castes, and the upper castes and classes, as noted by Siddharth (2012) and Srivastava (2005). The two scholars further highlight that the lowest castes are generally landless, asset-less and illiterate while the upper castes hold natural, cultural, social and financial capital at their disposal. It is the

exclusion from assets, resources and opportunities that forces people to provide their own labour as collateral for credit. Those who offer credit, as they control employment opportunities through land and through the rise of agricultural industries, use it as a tool to control labour and production through debt (Siddharth, 2012; Srivastava, 2005).

Furthermore, those in bondage have for the most part been excluded from partaking in the social opportunity of education. Children, whose labour is pledged, forgo the possibility of an education and the benefits it brings. The building of skills and assets to seek different forms of employment and livelihoods are hampered. In essence, educational deprivation through bondage likely leads, even more so today, to a continued powerlessness and dependence on the system of debt and further bondage, be it of oneself or of a family member.

Given this reality, it could be argued that education can be a resource and opportunity for those who have been excluded from all sorts of opportunities. It could potentially provide capacities to integrate into better forms of employment or wider social opportunities. Yet this requires the provision of resources and opportunities and a transformation of the social reality that engendered exclusion and bondage in the first place. This thesis engages with these issues and explores the theme of education for formerly bonded labourers.

## **1.2 Rationale**

As mentioned, debt bondage is rampant throughout southern Asia, and in particular in India. Although precise numbers are hard to come by, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have suggested that the number of bonded child labourers is around 10 to 15 million in India alone (CWA, 2007<sup>1</sup>). Within the nation, Tamil Nadu is likely to be one of five States that have the highest concentration of bonded labour (the others being Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh) (Srivastava, 2005). It has various pockets of industries with a high incidence of child bondage such as the silk industry, match industries, and brick kilns.

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<sup>1</sup> The same report also points to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) lower estimate of around 5.5 million children in forced labor in general in all of Asia and the Pacific. It gives government figures of 1998 which estimated only 251,000 bonded laborers of whom 3,300 were bonded children.



Various legal frameworks and government schemes aim at tackling the issue of bonded child labour. The *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976* declared bonded labour relations illegal, declared all bonded labourers as free and exempt from debt and ordered State governments to economically rehabilitate former, bonded labourers (CWA, 2007). The 1997 *Supreme Court in Union for Civil Liberties vs State of Tamil Nadu*<sup>2</sup> directed the National Human Rights Commission to supervise the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 (CWA 2007)<sup>3</sup>. While these are not specifically child focused, the *Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986*<sup>4</sup> prohibits work of children under 14 in hazardous occupations and regulates work in non-hazardous occupations. The *National Policy on Child Labour 1987* was set in motion to enforce the act<sup>5</sup>. This led to action plans under the National Child Labour Project Scheme (NCLP) which not only aimed at identifying child labourers but also mainstreaming them into formal education through bridge schools. To achieve these ends it set up its own special schools and works in synergy with India's flagship program for universal primary education, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA). It does so by mainstreaming former child labourers in the age group of 5-9 years through state run bridge schools or courses which are under the SSA scheme that target out-of-school children.

In 2004 Tamil Nadu was the State which had identified and rehabilitated the most bonded labourers in India (Srivastava, 2005). It has also set in motion various educational programmes that aim to rehabilitate and integrate child labourers - of whom bonded children are a sub-group - through the NCLP. Other organizations, such as the ILO, have also been involved in providing educational programmes with the same aims in Tamil Nadu.

Despite these legal frameworks and programmes, child debt bondage remains a complex social phenomenon which, as the ILO notes, is highly invisible, extremely difficult to engage with and tends to be neglected by policy makers (2010). A Human Rights Watch report on the silk industry in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh also remarks that bonded child labourers tend to fall between the cracks of the existing policies and, in many cases, have not benefited from educational programmes (HRW, 2003). The Child Workers in Asia Task Force on Bonded Child Labour (CWA, 2007) has suggested that much more understanding is

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<sup>2</sup> For the full *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976* see:

<http://www.humanrights.asia/issues/right-to-food/jurisprudence/india/bonded-labour-system-abolition-act-1976.pdf/view>

<sup>3</sup> For the full 1997 *Supreme Court in Union for Civil Liberties vs State of Tamil Nadu* see: <http://supremecourtfindia.nic.in/outtoday/3922.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> For the full Act see: <http://labour.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Divisions/childlabour/act.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See the Ministry of Labour: <http://labour.gov.in/content/division/child-labour.php>

needed on the connections between education and debt bondage to improve rehabilitation of former child bonded labourers.

Although a vast amount of literature is available on the theme of bonded labour in India, very few look in depth at the relationship between this phenomenon and education. Mishra (2002) produced a vast annotated bibliography of some of the major works published over the decades of the 1970s to the 1990s. A perusal of these shows that the predominant themes and approaches are analyses of debt bondage as a phenomenon, a legal perspective on dealing with bondage, and rehabilitation related issues. Most of the works that deal with rehabilitation highlight shortcomings and ineffectiveness of programmes and government provisions which focus primarily on the economic aspect. They also add recommendations for improvement which include some form or other of educational provision, such as training for adults and free compulsory education for children (Chandolia, 1979; Dogra, 1987; Hamilpurker, 1989; Kulkarni, 1988; Mishra, 1987; Muthurayappa, 2001; Nainta, 1997; Pais, 1987 all cited in Mishra, 2002). An interesting article on rehabilitation that highlights the importance of a holistic approach and of stakeholders, such as NGOs, can be found in Mishra 1987 (cited in Mishra, 2002). Though education is seen as part of rehabilitating former bonded labourers, under what terms and to what extent it can actually do so is not explored. The same observations can be made of newer works by Siddharth (2012) and Srivastava (2005) while those of Guérin (2013), Guérin et al. (2013), and Carswell and De Neve (2013, 2014) focus instead on contemporary rural changes and the transformation of debt bondage.

Given the high incidence of bondage and its complexities in India, the existence of cracks in government frameworks and programmes targeted at releasing and rehabilitating children, and the gap in knowledge, this thesis explores more in depth the relationship between education and bondage aiming at presenting a richer understanding of how the two social realities affect each other. This is further justified since this historic form of social exclusion is not on the demise but is instead interacting with modernizing and global forces. In fact, the forms and patterns of bondage are shifting from its traditional, agrarian, feudal form of patronage to different sectors of the changing economy within the system of production and profit (Breman, 1996; Srivastava, 2005).

## 1.3 Overall Research Purpose

*The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role and importance education has in assisting ex-bonded children and youth to integrate into society.*

In India, and hence Tamil Nadu, according to the *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976* and the *National Policy on Child Labour 1987*, the state has the responsibility to identify, release and mainstream former, bonded child labourers into the formal education system. According to government policy and initiatives on Child Labour and Education for All, provisions are made for those up to the age of 14 to receive special bridge courses to facilitate direct mainstreaming into their age equivalent grades. This could be considered as a form of integration since they are released from a condition of being economically oppressed and educationally deprived and are inserted into a condition of social opportunity: that of benefiting from state provided education.

Being mainstreamed into the public education system can also lead to their future integration into wider society outside of debt bondage. For the purpose of the thesis, this means understanding the concept of integration as enabling authentic participation in society. For those who are from lower and disadvantaged castes, this means being able to partake and enjoy social opportunities such as further education, secure employment and political participation. This underlines the role education can have in assisting those out of bondage to ensure their current freedom and expand their future freedoms and engagement in their social world.

Given that the government has the primary responsibility to ensure identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers, the thesis originally aimed at understanding: 1) to what extent government programmes, such as the NCLP, managed to reach former, bonded child labourers and succeeded in mainstreaming them into the formal system; and 2) whether education had helped mainstreamed students increase their capabilities. However, permission to study government programmes and access to data was not granted, and the existence of debt bondage was even denied by government officials. Therefore, the issue was instead explored through a local grass-root organization and the community it assisted educationally. While the overall research purpose remains the same, the approach and the specific research questions were adapted.

## 1.4 Conceptual Clarifications

### 1.4.1 Bonded Child Labour

According to ILO, child labour “is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development”<sup>6</sup>. It concerns all work that is “mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.” ILO considers debt bondage as one of the worst forms of child labour, defined by Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182: “(a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict”.

Child bonded labour falls under the concept of child labour. In this thesis priority is given to the aspect of being “bonded”. The focus on “child” debt bondage under the lens of child labour can miss complexities of debt bondage since bondage also manifests itself in child labour while the opposite is not necessarily true: child labour does not create “bondedness”. Bondage, therefore, looms over a community and also affects youth and can be extremely detrimental to their education. While the NCLP, for example, defines children as those between the ages of 5 to 14, one can become bonded or released after the age of 14. Allowing bondage to conceptually take precedence over “child labour”, therefore, provides a more nuanced picture. In this thesis child bonded labourers include those who were bonded as youth, following the UN definition of a child as being up to the age of 18 years old (UN 1989).

### 1.4.2 Definition of Scheduled Caste

The thesis deals with a particular scheduled caste (SC), the Arunthathiyar, and focuses on issues that relate to social groups under this category. While, today, the term SC designates

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<sup>6</sup> All of the following citations are taken from the ILO: <http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

groups from the lower strata of Indian society using a socio-economic criterion, it still refers to traditional Hindu-based groupings of low castes.

The traditional caste system which continues to strongly influence the stratification of society is believed to have its origins in a form of division of labour which was based on four major occupational classes or *varnas* known as: *Brahmins* - the educated class of scholars and priests; *Kshatriyas* - the warriors and kings; *Vaishayas* - traders and producers of wealth; and *Shudras* - the lowest of all and hence service providers for the other three classes (Chauhan, 2008; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Srinivas (1962 cited in Chauhan, 2008) suggests that within each of these occupational classes, sub classes called *jatis* or castes were formed and were characterized as being hereditary, endogamous groupings - marriage being only allowed within the group - and named according to their designated occupation. Outside of these four groupings of castes another one was formed: the untouchables.

Today, these castes have been regrouped according to cultural, socio-economic and educational parameters into three main categories: forward castes (FCs) that are advanced; other backward castes (OBCs) which can have some affluent groups but overall are socially and educationally backward; and SCs and scheduled tribes (STs) which are lowest in all these regards (Chauhan, 2008). The term “scheduled caste” has come to designate in particular those who were originally known as the untouchables or downtrodden (*Dalits*) and deprived of equal educational and socio-economic opportunities. STs instead refer to the indigenous populations of India who have also been highly deprived in socio-economic terms.

For SCs, deprivation was due specifically to the low status tied to their socio-cultural role in occupations considered unclean, such as handling dead carcasses or human waste. This led to their exclusion from the other four *varnas*. They were socially distanced from other groups in day-to-day life by prohibitions of physical contact, sharing of water wells and other forms of exclusion (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Given this historical reality, the Indian constitution designates SCs as those who are entitled to positive discrimination by the government. This aims to promote equality and justice by reserving quotas in civil service posts, higher education institutions, and in political structures.

## 1.5 Specific Research Questions

To achieve the overall purpose of understanding the role and importance of education in integrating former, bonded child labourers into society, the following specific research questions were pursued:

- 1) Why is education valued and prioritized by those working with formerly bonded labourers?
- 2) How do ex-bonded child labourers interpret the role of education in transforming their lives given their own experience in bondage?

The first research question addresses the assumption that the plight of formerly bonded children and youth is tied to those who work for their identification, release and access to education. The importance or value attached to education by those working with bonded labourers is highly pertinent in understanding the role education can have in empowering them for their future integration.

The second question assumes that although “measurables” have been gained through education which can assist in integrating into society, formerly bonded labourers are human agents and their integration requires their own awareness of what they have learned and how this can be used in society in light of their experiences as bonded. Integration is, therefore, also tied to their aspirations, the value they attach to education and what it can offer them.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis has been structured as follows: Chapter 2 elaborates on the background provided in the introductory chapter. It focuses on three aspects: changes in the rural landscape of Tamil Nadu and how these affect SCs; the SC group of this thesis – the Arunthathiyar; and issues pertaining to the expansion of education in rural contexts for SCs.

Chapter 3 presents the overall research strategy and methods. It explores underlying assumptions of the social sciences, sampling rationales, procedures for data collection and analysis, issues pertaining to reliability and validity, and the limitations of the thesis. It also introduces the site of the fieldwork and the sampled respondents. Chapter 4 presents the

analytical framework, exploring key concepts from Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and their relevance for understanding what emerged from the analysis of the data.

The two research questions are addressed in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 in which the data are presented and analysed in light of the general context. Chapter 5 discusses the way debt bondage reproduces itself at the cost of education so that those who are historically bonded remain in these conditions. Chapter 6 highlights primarily the selected NGO's role in mediating opportunities to formerly bonded labourers in order to sustain their education in light of its interpretation of the government's role. Chapter 7 expands on the value attached to education by the NGO to overcome conditions that lead to bondage and how this has affected formerly bonded students. The concluding Chapter 8 reviews the findings in light of the core concepts of Giddens' (1984) structuration theory with particular emphasis on the relationship between education and social change.

## **2 Situating Bondage and Education in Rural South India**

In order to better understand how education can assist formerly bonded labourers, it is important to locate both education and debt bondage in the broader social world from which they emerge and identify the ways in which they can affect a particular social group. This chapter focuses on rural changes in Tamil Nadu and their ramifications for SCs and debt bondage. It also explores the caste of particular interest: the Arunthathiyar and its socio-historical position in Western Tamil society. Issues regarding the education system and how this relates to SCs and the rural context are also presented.

### **2.1 Transformation of Rural Tamil Nadu and New Forms of Bondage**

Over the last decades, the rural landscape of Tamil Nadu has been transformed through its rapid industrialization and an increased reach of social policy. The former has led to a modified rural and agrarian economy, an increased urbanization of the rural context and the expansion of communications and transportation into villages (Djurfeldt et al., 2008; Guérin et al., 2013; Heyer, 2013). All these changes have affected castes in different ways (Heyer, 2013; Harris-White, 2002) as they have come into contact with pre-existing socio-economic and cultural structures.

The changes have led to a reduction in agricultural labour and offered new opportunities outside of villages even for the most oppressed in the village economy (Djurfeldt et al., 2008). However, the group of oppressed finds itself in the paradoxical situation that most of those who move out of the village economy do so under unfavourable terms, while those who stay are likewise in an un-advantageous position (Djurfeldt et al., 2008). This is because new employment opportunities are increasingly fragmented and segmented along caste lines (Harris-White, 2002; Guérin, 2013) leaving SCs and STs to the most degrading forms of employment, the most bonded types of labour and in casual agricultural labour (Guérin, 2013). Furthermore, in the category of SCs, labour opportunities have become more differentiated, with some being able to avail themselves of new



opportunities and achieve mobility while others transition into new forms of bondage (Guérin et al., 2013).

The ability to make use of new opportunities is also tied to a range of factors: village location and access to urban centres (Carswell & De Neve, 2013, 2014), typology of village (Guérin et al., 2013; Djurfeldt et al., 2008) and the degree of subordination or dependency of a caste (Creswell & De Neve, 2013). This becomes clearer when examining village patterns. Guérin et al. (2013) underline that “wet” villages (situated in well irrigated areas) still represent a predominance of agriculture and a higher level of caste interdependence with forms of old bonded labour relations. This is in contrast to what are considered peri-urban settlements where people flow to and from towns. Here change is most visible due to what can be accessed: employment; credit; and government benefits. These are accessed more easily and are less mediated by the upper castes than in villages where greater caste interdependence is present (Guérin et al., 2013). A village’s location, its access to urban centres and its typology also have a bearing upon caste dependency in terms of loosening or maintaining it.

This situation is nuanced by the fact that dominant castes within the village also have benefited from the new opportunities outside of the village economy (Djurfeldt et al., 2008). As will be argued below, this could mean that access to employment outside of agriculture may in fact be mediated by upper castes and lead to new forms of bondage (Carswell & De Neve, 2013). On the other hand, state social policy – including for education, health and nutrition - can also support access to these new opportunities as they lessen the dependency of lower castes on other castes (Heyer, 2013). Mobility or access to new opportunities for SCs is likely to be tied to the way changes can lessen or transform their dependency. This can either provide them with an advantage in terms of positioning themselves in the urban context and in the type of employment to be found, or lead to them into new forms of bondage.

Debt bondage, having been predominately part of the rural world, is also under transformation. Its existence in agricultural labour has decreased particularly with the expansion of industrial labour, affirmative action and social policy (Guérin, 2013). It has changed from a monolithic agricultural feudal system by being integrated into a capitalistic structure of agro-industries, rural industries and urban industries. It also presents itself in a continuum of oppressiveness and restriction of freedom (Bremar, 2006; Guérin, 2013).

All these forms of bondage are tied to the transition of the economy in specific historical contexts of caste based relationships and modes of socialization (Guérin, 2013). In other words, the new forms of bondage are still tied to caste relationships and how these define social roles under economic change and new opportunities. As Guérin (2013) notes, bondage is possible precisely because it is grounded in existing social hierarchies, continued discrimination of SCs and STs, and because of the highly unequal power relationships and the acceptance of these relationships. As stated by Guérin (2013, p. 415): “present day bondage relationships arise only in communities where the verticalized ties of subordination, historically and socially rooted in both employers’ and workers’ consciousness, are still sufficiently strong to make subordination acceptable”. Bondage continues to be tied to the way upper and lower castes relate to one another, how the former mediates opportunities to the latter, and the mental horizons that allow for it.

This process of transformation through continuation of caste based relationships can be exemplified by De Neve’s (1999) case of the tailoring industry in Western Tamil Nadu. Many of the former landlords from the Gounder caste moved out of agriculture and entered the tailoring industry. As they did so, they introduced the agricultural practice of attaching labour through advances and began with those who were formerly bonded in agriculture. In another study, Carswell and De Neve (2013) highlight that this process of bonding workers existed precisely to control labour and was done by creating or maintaining dependency. They argue that rural dependency relations are simply re-configured through advances and debts, which explains why bondage occurs along caste lines with those at the bottom being the ones who continue to be bonded. In this way dependency is extended from traditional village relations into the industrial rural world.

### **2.1.1 The Arunthathiyar in Western Tamil Nadu**

Within the state of Tamil Nadu (Figure 2.1) there are around 76 different types of SC groups. Of these, there are three main groups: the Pallar; the Paraiyar; and the Arunthathiyar. The latter is also known as the Chakkliyar (a derogative name pointing to their low status as leather workers) and includes a subset of caste groupings, such as the Madari or Matari

(Telugu names) and the Chakkliyan<sup>7</sup> (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2009). There is little literature available on the Arunthathiyar. A professor at Chennai's Loyola College noted during an informal conversation: "This caste is so low that they have not been studied". Two historical studies focus on the Madari sub-group and their degree of dependency during the first half of the last century up to the 1970s. In addition, a couple of studies focus on the Chakkliyan sub-groups in the latter half of the century up to the present date. Although the studies are not necessarily representative of all Arunthathiyar in the entire region of West Tamil Nadu, they do shed much light upon their conditions in the research site for this thesis, the Taramangalam block of the district of Salem<sup>8</sup>.



**Figure 2.1 Tamil Nadu District Map**  
Source: Maps of the World (2013)

<sup>7</sup> Chakkliyan refers to a sub-division of the Arunthathiyar while Chakkliyar is the derogatory name used for the whole caste.

<sup>8</sup> As noted, the Arunthathiyar is a SC that includes sub-divisions such as Madari, Arundahathiyar and Chakkliyan. However all share the same origin, language, traditional social role as leather-workers, an extremely low socio-economic position, and dependency on land-owning upper castes.

## **The Situation of the Madari early 1900 - early 1970**

Beck's study (1972) situates the Madari<sup>9</sup> within the broader division of castes in the Kogunadu region - a part of western Tamil Nadu which today covers the area from Coimbatore to Salem District (see Figure 2.1). Castes were organized into two groups which were termed the right and the left divisions. The right division was a group composed of castes including one dominant, landowning caste and castes which depended on it for agricultural employment. The castes from the left division did not accept land owner domination. They were therefore less dependent, attempting instead to acquire material wealth through non-agriculturally related work such as crafts and commerce. Both groups aimed at increasing prestige and power although in different ways: one by controlling land; the other through material possession and "purity" from studying Sanskrit. This differentiation made castes in the left division settle for the most part in urban centres and invest in education. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, castes from the left division usually had twice as high literacy rates as those from the right division; including the dominant landowners<sup>10</sup>. Even after 50 years when literacy had tripled in the area of study, those from the left division were still more educated.

Although the Madari belonged to the left community, as leather workers they were extremely dependent on the Gounder community and on farming as their skills were used for irrigation before farming became mechanized (Cederlöff, 1997). As a result, the group lived for the most part in villages, and was not only the lowest in the left group but was lower than the lowest of the right group: the Pariyar<sup>11</sup> that, in contrast to the general trend, had higher levels of education than the Madari.

According to Beck (1972) the Pariyar lived closer to the ritual centres while the Madari lived scattered in harder-to-reach areas which were far from schools, shops and roadsides. The Pariyar lived in wider, cleaner streets with homes of plaster and tiles as opposed to the Madari who lived in dirtier, un-plastered houses and narrower lanes. This indicates that the Madari was a poorer and more marginal community and are claimed to have had a stronger sense of self-inferiority. There were levelling influences amongst castes of the

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<sup>9</sup> In this literature review the name of the sub-caste used in the original work is repeated.

<sup>10</sup> Both divisions had hierarchies. The comparison is between castes that share relatively the same position in hierarchy; e.g. the highest left caste had around twice as high literacy as the Gounders, the highest caste within the right division.

<sup>11</sup> As noted above, the Pariyar is a different SC, and one of main three SC groups of Tamil Nadu: (Arunthathiyar, Pallar and Pariyar).

right division and the Pariyar aspired to achieve equality and overcome differences particularly through education. For the Madari, bridging the social gap was not a possibility given their own attitude towards their social standing. As the Pariyar gained in education, medical assistance and mobility, particularly through Christian missionaries, the Madari instead constituted a large number of unskilled agricultural labourers (Beck 1972).

Cederlöf (1997) studied more in-depth the dependence of the Madari on the Goundar land owning community. The relationship was originally due to the importance of cattle in agriculture and the Madari's role in pasturing and tending to dead carcasses. With the shift to cash crops and the increased need to irrigate dry lands, the Madari assumed a role in producing leather buckets for irrigation. They were for the most part under the 'panniyal' system which is a form of feudal agricultural bondage: they were advanced a share of the future produce offering them some form of security, while preventing their mobility by tying them to the landowners. Originally, the payment was in kind (grain and liquor). Child labour was a means of receiving advanced payment in return for pasturing cattle, cleaning, and looking after other animals for one year. If parents were unable to repay the advance it was either deducted from their pay or the child was forced to work for another year. Cederlöf (1997) notes that this type of bonded, child labour outlasted the adult 'panniyal' system for decades.

Cederlöf (1997) also observes that the Madari were purposefully controlled since they represented an essential component of labour before irrigation became mechanized. According to one of the Goundar landowners: "“we kept them low’ ” (p. 70). This, in turn, led to their lack of social mobility, or at least the opportunity for it, in contrast to the Pariyar who were able to migrate and work for the British either on estates, railways or as domestic servants, and were able to become educated and politically conscious. This allowed them to earn money on better terms, improve their economic conditions and, more importantly, provide them with a way out of the local village socio-economic structures that still bound the Madari.

As Cederlöf (1997) further notes, the social position of the Madaris was very low: they were stigmatized and despised, having several impure functions, such as carrying dead animals or messages for upper caste families when someone died. Social distance was also established by geographic separation since they lived in separate hamlets on the outside of the main villages. All these factors led to: "... *small incentives for Madhari to leave the villages*

*to seek industrial employment and the structural obstacles in the customary laws served to keep the Madhari within the agricultural economy” (Cederlöff, 1997, p.114).*

The mechanization of irrigation and years of droughts changed the labour relationship so that it no longer meant a feudal system with a form of security, but transitioned into casual agricultural labour. As Cederlöff (1997) notes, it was difficult for the Madari to leave the system of security and enter labour markets, such as the expanding industries, where they had to compete with Pariyar and Goundar communities that had already entered factories and estates. Until the 1970s, there was no evidence that the Madari attempted to become wage labourers by entering the labour market as free individuals. According to Cederlöff (1997) there was little incentive to do so by leaving their traditional village world. Moreover, as they became agricultural coolies (working for daily wages) for landowners, their children became bonded because of debt the only form of bondage still intact. Even until the 1970s, education had made no or very little impact on the community and for more than forty years, during the 1930s - 1970s) the community had no mobility but kept its position at the bottom of society.

### **The situation of the Chakkliyan and the Madari 1980s - early 2000s**

Heyer (2000, 2012, 2013) studied village changes in the Coimbatore District from the 1980s to 2000s focusing on transformations for the Chakkliyan. In 1981/82 this sub-caste was in the same socio-economic position as the Madari in the 1970s. Nearly all were in agriculture and working within the village. There was a high degree of subordination since many were attached or bonded labourers. Children started working from the age of 10 or 12, instead of going to school, since it was believed that it was important for them to get used to agricultural labour from a young age. Moreover, there was little support from the state government which led to high dependence on upper caste farmers for loans and other forms of security.

Heyer (2000, 2012, 2013) highlights that from the 1980s to 1996 and again in 2008/9, changes in the rural landscape, including improved transportation, communication and social policy, meant that urban and industrial opportunities became available to all villagers. This began to weaken the caste-based system of exploitation. None the less, in 1996 the Chakkliyan were the least able to benefit from these new opportunities: they had the weakest position outside the village and their condition of dependency and subordination in the village hampered what they could actually do. According to Heyer (2000), they were unable to own land, did not have access to higher wages, could not access certain types of credit or gain

independent access, i.e. unmediated by the upper castes, to state benefits. Moreover, their lower level of education meant that they had less experience and knowledge of what could facilitate their transition to non-agricultural work. Their historical socio-cultural position in the village, therefore, hampered their ability to take advantage of new opportunities.

When Heyer returned in 2008/09 (2013), SCs were employed in better non-agricultural occupations, though few owned land. There was little agricultural bondage and practically no child labour, increased access to education and deeper penetration of social welfare. There was also reduced dependency on the elite in the village with social policy playing a key role in facilitating integration into the industrial economy that was booming (Heyer, 2012).

Carswell and De Neve (2013, 2014) instead show how earlier dependency of the Madari facilitated their bondage in village industries rather than permitting them access to opportunities in cities. In their study area, near the Tiruppur garment industry, the Madari were characterized by lack of education, long-term dependency on the landlord Goundar caste, and deeper involvement in the rural economy. Much like in Heyer's village, this explains their later access to new opportunities compared to other SCs such as the Pariyar. This was nuanced by a contrast between villages with better access to employment opportunities due to their proximity to cities, and villages which were less connected and had many rural based power looms. These were set up by the Goundar who were able to bond labour through their traditional practice of giving advances (De Neve 1999). Carswell and De Neve (2013, 2014) consider this form of bondage in power looms as a continued form of rural caste elite control over lower caste labour and suggest that the Madari are still enslaved to the same Gounder community though only in a new setting: the power loom village industry.

The studies show that the Arunthathiyar, or the sub-groups studied, have been the most dependent SC on upper castes. They were tied to the village economy and unable to position themselves favourably in terms of new opportunities that became available. This seems in part related to their lower level of education which could be linked to the group's mentality and the practice of child bonded labour. They were, however, targeted for bondage in new industrial forms which also likely prevented them from seeking other opportunities. On the other hand changes in infrastructure, improved communication, new job opportunities and social policies, including education, could weaken their dependency on upper castes. Its availability has varied over time but is now a core issue in policies in India. As appears in the

following, not only does the nation aim at achieving universal primary education (UPE) by targeting groups such as SCs, but hopes to use affirmative action in education to enable such groups to find mobility.

## **2.2 Increasing Educational Opportunities for Rural Scheduled Castes**

India is a federal state with currently 29 individual states and 6 union territories. Most states, Tamil Nadu included, have a system of primary education consisting of the primary level of 5 years (grades 1-5 and ages 6-11) and an upper primary level of 3 years (grades 6-8 and ages 12-14). This is followed by secondary education which is also divided into lower secondary of 2 years (grades 9-10 and ages 15-16) and upper secondary of 2 years (grades 11-12 and ages 17-18). Entrance into upper secondary education depends on government exams based on which students are tracked into different streams. This is followed by tertiary education based on results in public examinations at the end of upper secondary education.

The central government is responsible for national frameworks and policy planning through the Department of School Education and Literacy and the Department of Higher Education which are both under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. State governments coordinate education programmes at the local level. Since the 1990s, educational planning and management for primary education have been decentralized to the district level which is the administrative unit immediately under the state (Prakash, 2008; GoI, 2004).

Since 2000, the expansion of primary education to reach UPE (grades I-VIII) has been promoted particularly under the Central Government Scheme of the SSA and aims at bridging social gaps (including gender) at the lower and the upper primary level. Districts launch specific plans within the framework of the SSA which focus on reaching disadvantaged groups, such as SCs, STs, out-of-school children and girls, to increase their access and retention in primary education (GoI, 2004). There is a strong emphasis on mainstreaming out-of-school children through bridge courses, remedial courses, and camps which assist in getting them back into the formal system. Child labourers in the age group of 5-9 years are



also targeted. The SSA framework also sets as a priority the improvement of quality, through for example, a more relevant curriculum.

The SSA has built on a more participatory approach through consultations with local governments and village education committees in developing plans and with NGOs, parents, teachers and local officials in setting goals and designing strategies to achieve UPE (GoI, 2004). Through the SSA, the central government provides funding to states for civil works, teacher salaries, alternative schools and bridge courses for dropouts or out-of-school children. Funding has been targeted to close the gaps of caste and gender, while allowing districts flexibility in planning interventions (Kingdon, 2007).

The targeted groups are those who historically have been the least able to benefit from education. While poverty is known to affect the probability of attending schools to various degrees in different states (Asadullah & Yalonetzky, 2011; Duraisamy, 2000; Filmer & Pritchett, 2001), other factors affect the probability of enrolment, namely: parental education (Duraisamy, 2000), belonging to a SC or ST, and student and parental motivation. These tend to be associated with wider issues of costs of opportunity and also with the quality of facilities and education provided (Drèze & Kingdon, 2001). Belonging to a SC reduces the probability of attending school particularly in rural contexts (Bandyopadhyay & Govinda, 2010) and increases the probability that a child is engaged in work instead (Duraisamy, 2000).

### **2.2.1 Education for Scheduled Castes**

Table 2.1 shows the general level of education of SCs in the rural context. For the years 2004/05 and 2009/10 there was a high number of illiterates. Of those with an education, most had reached the primary or the upper primary level (middle). Only a small percentage reached higher secondary and graduate levels. There have been some improvements between the years 2004/05 and 2009/10 which favoured girls slightly more at the primary level, reducing the gender gap.

The more recent expansion of primary education may have improved access for SCs. Figure 2.2 shows that both net and gross enrolment ratios (GER) increased for lower primary education from 2003 to 2007/2008 for all of India. The data does not include upper primary level but refers to school children aged 5-10 years and hence grades I-V. The GER increased for both sexes between 2003 and 2007 and then was largely constant until 2012. The GER

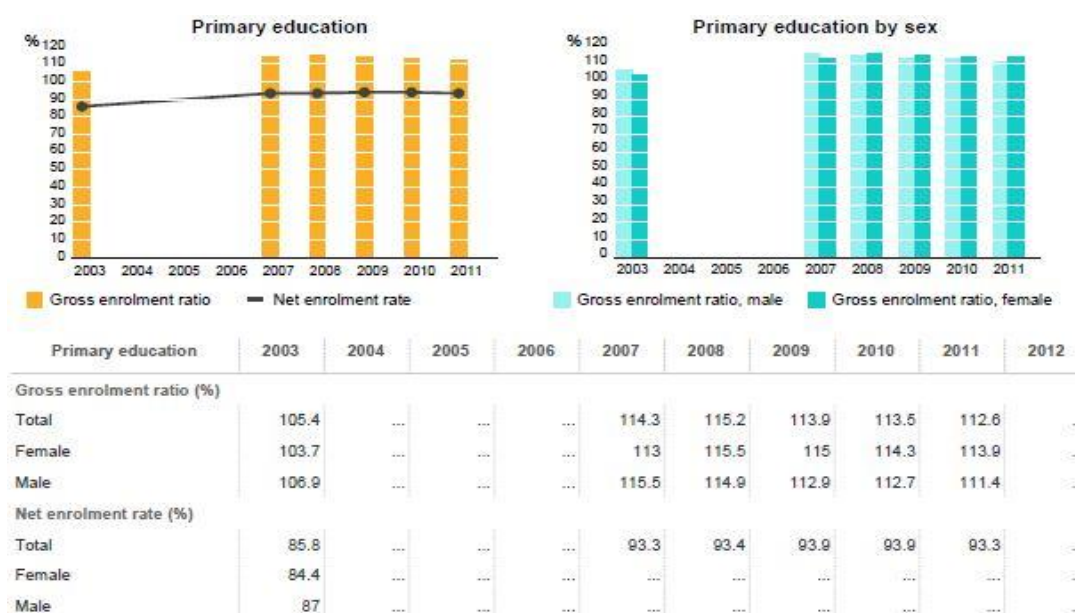
over 100% likely includes many over aged children given the expansion of the system. The net enrolment rose somewhat from around 86% to a steady 93% - during 2007-2011.

**Table 2.1 Level of General Education for Rural SCs, 2004/05-2009/10, %, age 15 and above**

Level of General Education	2004-05		2009-10	
	SC Female	SC Male	SC Female	SC Male
Not literate	68.5	40.7	58.1	33.1
Literate & up to primary	16.6	27.7	20.1	27.6
Middle	8.5	17.2	11.6	19.7
Secondary	3.5	7.6	6.3	10.9
Higher Secondary	1.8	3.9	2.6	5.4
Diploma/Certificate	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.5
Graduate & above	0.7	2.2	1.1	2.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: NIRD - National Institute of Rural Development (GoI), 2014

Note: Middle level also refers to upper primary level.



**Figure 2.2 Enrolment Ratios at Primary Level in India, 2003-2011**

Source: UNESCO, 2014

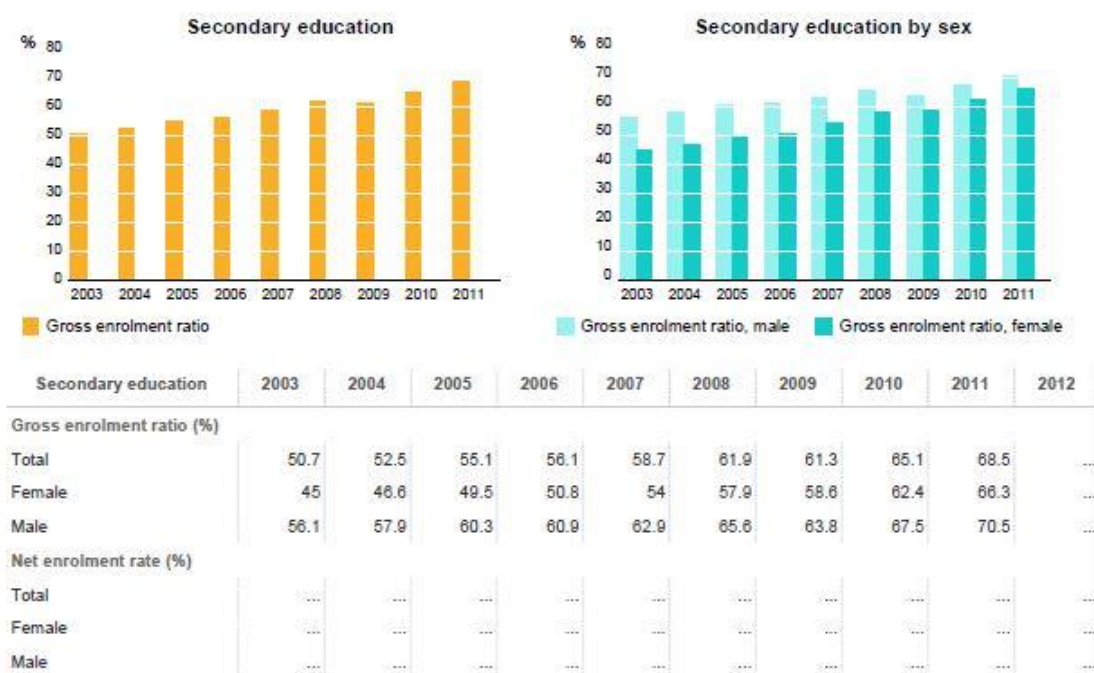


Figure 2.3 Enrolment Ratios at Secondary Level in India, 2003-2012

Source: UNESCO, 2014

As can be seen in Figure 2.3, GER at upper primary level through secondary level increased by approximately 18% between 2003 and 2011 compared to a 7% increase at the primary level. The gap between the sexes decreased from approximately 11% to around 4%.

Table 2.2 Gross Enrolment Ratio for Rural SC, 1986/87-2007/08, %

	1986-87	1990-91	2000-01	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2007-08
<b>Class I-V</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>84.4</b>	<b>106.4</b>	<b>96.8</b>	<b>95.6</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>115.3</b>	<b>118.6</b>	<b>124.93</b>
Female	64.8	86.2	85.8	89.4	83.0	106.6	110.2	124.31
Male	103.8	125.5	107.3	101.4	93.1	123.3	126.3	125.51
<b>Class VI-VIII</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>70.2</b>	<b>73.48</b>	<b>80.17</b>
Female	26.60	35.8	53.3	48.6	63.4	61.5	65.06	78.08
Male	52.7	68.7	76.2	63.2	79.4	77.9	81.05	82.07

Source: NIRD - National Institute of Rural Development (GoI), 2014

The increase in GER at all levels of education refers to all social groups in India. However, as shown in Table 2.2, during 2003-2008 there was a noticeable increase in GER for rural SCs at both the primary level (I-V) and upper primary level (VI-VIII). According to Figure 2.2 and Table 2.2, the GER of the rural SC likely increased at a higher rate than the

national GER<sup>12</sup>. It seems, therefore, that rural SCs are gradually catching up and benefiting from the additional opportunities for primary education provided through the SSA.

## 2.2.2 Education for Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu

The state of Tamil Nadu appears to ensure a high participation of SCs in education, also beyond the primary level. According to Table 2.3, in 2010-2011 the GER rate in Tamil Nadu, although over 100%, was lower than those of India at the Primary Level for all social groups and for SCs. However, from Upper Primary through Upper Secondary the State had higher GER rates for all groups and SCs than the national average.

The high GER of SCs and of the general school population in Tamil Nadu is likely due not only to the push for UPE under the SSA, but also to specific policies that Tamil Nadu has set in place. The State has provided free public education up to lower secondary level since 1964 and for upper secondary level since 1978 (Kajisa & Palanichamy, 2009). It was the first State to make schooling compulsory in 1993 (Gold & Harris White, 2004) and, as Kajisa and Palanichamy (2009) note, policies implemented in the 1980s, such as midday meals (1982) and free uniforms and books (1985), helped reduce the costs of primary and upper primary education to almost its opportunity costs. Therefore, income and resource endowment have become less of an issue for families when investing in their children's schooling.

Table 2.3 Gross Enrolment Rates for India and Tamil Nadu, 2010-11

Gross Enrolment Ratio		Primary (I -V)	Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	Lower Secondary (IX-X)	Upper Secondary (XI-XII)
India	All	116	85.5	65.0	39.3
	SCs	132	92.3	70.9	38.3
Tamil Nadu	All	111.8	112.3	82.3	50.4
	SCs	126.2	129.3	104	59.5

Source: MHRD - Ministry of Human Resource Development (GoI), 2012

<sup>12</sup> The data sets have been compiled differently and the comparison between figures is at best indicative.

## 2.3 Limitations to Increased Participation

The increased participation of rural SCs in education because of its expansion does not necessarily mean increased mobility or opportunities. According to some scholars, the expansion of education could serve as a means of continued social stratification (Juneja, 2010) rather than reduced educational inequality (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). SCs and other groups living in rural areas - STs, Muslims, women and the poor - lose out in terms of education of quality, sustained access to upper levels of education, and future opportunities through education (Majumdar, 1999).

One of the reasons is that the education system is hybrid. The expansion of education has been achieved not only through government schemes for socially disadvantaged. The system ranges from elite private schools and well financed central government schools for civil servants, state funded public schools and non-formal centres that reach the most marginalized (Juneja, 2010). These diverse providers cater to different social sub-groups which further entrenches stratification because of quality differentials (Juneja, 2010; Cheney et al., 2005). One scholar has suggested that a hierarchy of access (Ramchandran, 2004 cited in Juneja, 2010) has emerged so that those without resources - namely the rural and urban poor - have access to government schools which vary greatly in terms of quality, while those who have resources access private aided or unaided schools of better quality (Cheney et al., 2005; Juneja, 2010). In addition, the expansion of public provision has likely been achieved at the cost of quality (Bandyopadhyay & Govinda, 2010; Cheney et al., 2005) which is manifested in the conditions of school infrastructure, the quality of teachers and of the curriculum, and in low achievements at both primary and secondary levels (Kingdon, 2007).

Tied to the issue of quality is the way SCs receive education. One study suggests that after controlling for socio-economic background and parental education, learning achievement, particularly in math and reading, relate to caste and religious beliefs (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). The educational process can lead to discrimination and exclusion: seating arrangements by caste; distribution of chores by caste; teachers applying learner categories by caste; and silencing of students from particular castes (Nambissan, 2010). According to Reddy and Sinha (2010), the school curriculum is tailored for the urban middle class, with many SCs and STs struggling with its relevance given their background in agriculture and scavenging.

In general, lower quality of schooling leads to inequitable access to upper levels of education because of dropout or insufficient achievement. At the higher levels, enrolments taper off for the school age population, in general, while the SC's relative share of enrolment also drops (Chauhan, 2008; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). In 2004, the SCs constituted 21% of the population in India and around 15-21% of enrolled children in primary education. In contrast, they were only 12-14% of those enrolled in secondary education and only 9% of those enrolled in higher education (Chauhan, 2008; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Given the systems expansion and SCs increased participation, their relative share might have gradually increased. These figures could also be higher in Tamil Nadu given the higher enrolment of SCs at upper primary and lower secondary (Table 2.3).

In addition, factors outside of education can contribute to dropout of rural SCs, such as deficient health and nutrition, poverty and child labour (Bandyopadhyay & Govinda, 2010). In the case of Tamil Nadu in, Ayres and Simon (2003) suggest that children from the poorest SC families are the least likely to attend school and the most likely to work. According to Ayres and Simon (2003), there is differentiation between families with resources to re-invest in asset building, such as human capital; and poor, asset-less and vulnerable families who have to respond to economic and social insecurity through traditional intra-village relations, such as bondage. As Kajisa and Palanichamy (2009) further note, financial shocks, such as those produced by droughts, are a prominent factor that can inhibit education in Tamil Nadu.

At the same time, the Government of India is using affirmative action through positive discrimination in order to equalize opportunities for historically marginalized groups by holding a percentage of openings for SCs, STs and OBCs in higher education institutions, civil service and government jobs. The number of reserved seats for higher education institutions is proportionate to the SC's share of the total population (21%). As noted above, only 9% of SCs are actually taking advantage of these reserved seats. According to some scholars (Chauhan, 2008; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008), the low level of educational achievement of SCs is responsible for their low level of participation, which renders the policy somewhat ineffective. This has also prompted a critique of the policy as being beneficial to only a "creamy layer" of SCs – i.e. those who have found mobility and are well off - and not those who are most in need (Chauhan, 2008; Sedwal & Kamaat, 2008).

Some civil servant and government jobs require only basic literacy (food service, sanitary work, watchman) or education up to grade 8 or 10 (drivers, technicians, typists). In

1999 they comprised 80% of available public sector jobs (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008) but are currently limited and diminishing (Deshpande & Newman, 2010). Higher level positions require higher levels of education and access to them may not be transparent and fair, but depend on more elaborate networks or bribery (Jefferey et al., 2004). SCs also face the reality that the labour market in India is fragmented in terms of caste (Harris-White, 2004), with diminished returns for them as a group (Kingdon, 2007). This also prevents them from securing employment based on their improved education (Jeffrey et al., 2004).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

What has appeared is that education is an essential component for formerly bonded labourers to lower dependence and to position themselves for new opportunities. There has been an increased participation in education by SCs in rural contexts generally in India and specifically in Tamil Nadu. However its potential role is limited by quality differentials of the education system, low level of achievements, and labour market discrimination. Progression to higher levels of education decreases for all groups, particularly so for SCs and, although positive discrimination is available to assist them in achieving social mobility, many of the reserved seats in higher education remain vacant. Furthermore, even though education has a strong presence in the State of Tamil Nadu, vulnerable SCs are less likely to invest in education, particularly during financial shocks, and are prone to continue in traditional village relations such as bondage.

This is further explored in this thesis. The following chapter sets out the design and methodology that were used to do so.

# 3 Research Design and Methods

## 3.1 Understanding Social Reality

This thesis adopts a critical realist position (Danermark et al., 2002) which holds that social reality is objective and therefore independent and preceding our knowledge of it. It is a layered reality which mediates our knowledge. Social reality has deeper structures or mechanisms - the real - that lead to actual social happenings or events. What is experienced empirically in the social world is a reflection of the deeper structures from which they emerge and of which we have no direct apprehension.

These deeper structures and mechanisms are constructed, upheld and transformed socially by humans, while at the same time being constitutive of the social world inhabited by humans (Danermark et al., 2002). This creates a tension since what is created and upheld by humans also leads to enduring conditions that, in turn, structure their action and interpretation of that world. Yet, the deeper structures are not directly apprehensible; instead they become known through human action and interpretations of the empirical world.

At the epistemological level, according to Danermark et al. (2002), while our knowledge departs from empirical manifestations, it should aim at understanding deeper structures. This means that data gathered at the empirical level should have theory building as an end. Theories should aim to posit the unobservable structures which caused the empirical phenomena that we observe. Different methods within qualitative or quantitative approaches can be used as they address either human interpretation of structures or actions that have been conditioned by such structures. Therefore, both approaches should lead to theories to understand deeper structures which can explain or account for what is empirically given. Danermark et al. (2002) suggest going beyond the logics of induction and deduction, and to use other logics such as abduction which aims at providing a plausible frame of interpretation for the already known empirical phenomenon by positing it as a structural cause.

During the work on this thesis, it became evident that the way education and debt bondage relate is tied to deeper social realities affecting the particular community of the specific caste. Understanding how education can impact a former, bonded labourer relates to the way both are socially structured; hence the importance of investigating deeper structures.



If humans create structures which, in turn, precede them and create conditions for their ensuing action, this seems to indicate regulation over radical transformation (Burrell & Morgan, 1982). However, the fact that the structures can be interpreted and transformed opens for radical transformation. Both positions are considered in this thesis.

## **3.2 Research Strategy**

Given the critical realist approach and the nature of the research as exploratory, the thesis focuses on the interpretive and action driven aspect through a qualitative approach. It seeks to understand how education is interpreted in light of bondage and the broader context which led to the latter and deprived of the former.

From the outset, a more generic inductive qualitative model was used (Bryman, 2010) that was not a fully grounded theory approach. This is due to the fact that while the strategy was open ended and aimed at generating concepts from the data, time limitation precluded the full use of a grounded approach leading to theoretical saturation, development of new concepts and theories followed by ensuing theoretical sampling and further saturation (Bryman, 2010). Nonetheless, the approach was grounded in terms of its aim to build theory from the concepts and categories that emerged from the collected data. While this generic qualitative inductive strategy was used, constraints in the field made the research become like a case study (Yin, 2003) since it focused on one local NGO and a group of its beneficiaries in a specific local context.

## **3.3 Sampling Strategy**

Since the study aimed at understanding the role of education in integrating formerly bonded labourers, those who could provide the most relevant interpretations of bondage and education were the focus of the sampling. This included those who work against bondage and for education at the government level and on the ground, and those who had been bonded but have received an education.

Furthermore, since a generic inductive qualitative model was used as a strategy, purposive or criteria based sampling was applied (Bryman, 2010; Elam et al., 2003). These criteria will be further elucidated below as pertains to research site, case study organization and participants. A typical case approach or logic (Bryman, 2010; Elam et al., 2003) was used for all three, with a logic of variation within the typical (Elam et al., 2003) added for participants. Opportunistic sampling was used to some degree to enrich the data collection with information regarding bondage, caste and education.

### **3.3.1 Research Site**

The State of Tamil Nadu was chosen since it has been at the forefront of systematically identifying, releasing and rehabilitating bonded labourers (Srivastava, 2005). The district of Salem (Figure 2.1) was selected as it has been classified as a child labour endemic district by the NCLP. The programme operates and implements bridge schools only in districts of States that are child labour endemic. Given that the NCLP is in charge of identifying child labourers and bonded child labourers and mainstreaming them into the formal system, child labour endemic districts could be considered to fulfil the dual criteria of both bondage being present, and government interventions taking place to address the issue.

According to the 2008 evaluation (IDA, 2008), the district has one of the largest urbanized populations in Tamil Nadu (47%) and a sizeable number of cottage and small scale industry, such as rope making, silver work and weaving which leads it to be prone to child labour. The 2001 census shows that rural Salem had the highest number of child workers (age 5-14) at 4% against 3% in Tamil Nadu (IDA, 2008). While 2003 SSA figures suggested a total of 7,957 child labourers in the district, the 2001 census indicated 27,589 child labourers (IDA, 2008). According to government officials who were interviewed, the district today has only 400 child labourers left.

In 2003 the greatest concentration of child labour was in the Salem block followed by the Taramangalam block<sup>13</sup> (IDA, 2008). The Taramangalam block (Figure 3.1) was selected as it hosts the sampled organization and the majority of respondents. At its “centre” is the town of Taramangalam: a bustling urbanized town with a variety of small shops, power-looms, construction sites, schools and a bus station. It is situated a 45 minutes bus drive out of

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<sup>13</sup> Districts are divided into lower administrative units known as blocks.

the district capital of Salem and around 30 minutes past a large government steel plant. It is surrounded by agricultural plantations, brick factories and power looms.

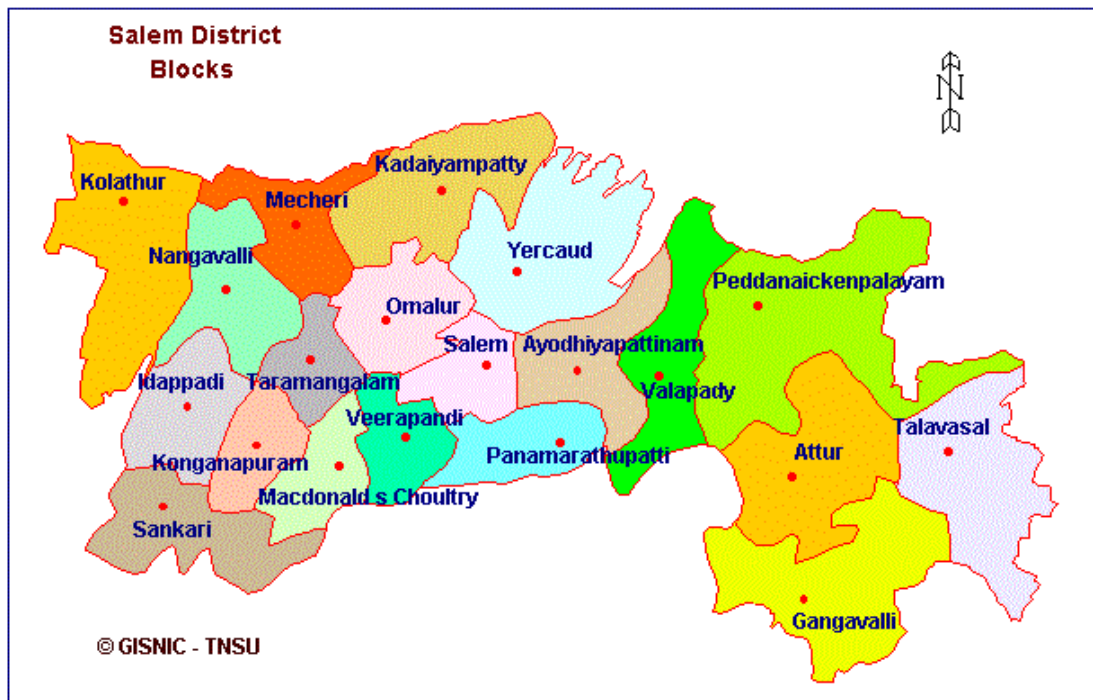


Figure 3.1 Salem District Map with Blocks  
Source: Salem District Government, 2014

Respondents reside in villages outside of the main centre, usually a good 20 minute drive. Access is via secondary roads which are well paved, but a 5 to 10 minutes ride away from the main roads. Villagers mostly live around agricultural fields in small houses with thatched roofs on land that they do not own. According to the sampled organization, they have been excluded from buying land and been given the worse lands, namely traditional dump sites. The communities are also excluded from temples but have set up their own small temples in the villages. Only a few respondents came from villages that are more strongly incorporated into towns.

Debt bondage is prevalent in the villages in varying forms. Some are still bonded in agriculture, while others are bonded in rural businesses, such as brick kilns, rope making and power-looms. Others are bonded through recruiters as migrants in the stone cutting industry of Bangalore. Besides casual agricultural work (coolie), labour opportunities consist primarily in scavenging, cleaning hospitals through government programmes, and construction work.

### **3.3.2 Selected Case Study Organization**

The criterion for selecting organizations or programmes was that they explicitly engage with formerly bonded child labourers and provide educational assistance in a meaningful and conscious way. This is because many stakeholders on the ground assist a wide range of vulnerable children, such as child labourers, street children, drop-outs and orphans, with services that range from housing and food to education. Yet to be able to assess how bondage and education relate to those who have been released, the group had to be targeted via an organization or program with an explicit educational component. This also facilitated access to formerly bonded labourers, who are extremely hard to reach. Even government programmes implemented through the SSA initiative and the NCLP projects are not necessarily the most relevant in terms of understanding the issue at stake.

In Tamil Nadu, three NGOs were identified that work directly with bonded labourers. Two are international NGOs and one is a local grass-root organization. The grass-root NGO in Salem was selected because one of the international NGOs was unable to host me and the other has a primarily legal focus for its work that is widely spread throughout districts surrounding the Chennai region. The selected NGO instead concentrates its work in a delimited area, works with a particular community and has a strong educational component not only in post-bondage but also in preventing bondage. This fitted well with the sampling criteria, research purpose and research questions since it allowed for a rich perspective on how bondage affects a community, its possibilities for education, and the role education can have.

Situated in the town of Tarmangalam, the NGO has been running since the early 2000s in a two story rented house. It was established by the current director who is a formerly bonded labourer from the Arunthathiyar caste who, after being released, completed secondary education and worked with other NGOs in the region on tackling bondage. The organization works specifically with this caste and undertakes surveys continuously to identify bonded labourers and child labourers and to present these as cases to government officials. It also advocates to ensure that the released labourers receive the kind of rehabilitation they are entitled to from the government, such as land, housing, 20,000 rupees per person, and educational assistance primarily in the form of bridge courses which mainstream children into formal schools.

The NGO also offers a six months tailoring course for women at the rented house and in three surrounding blocks, assists them to get government provided tailoring machines, and helps them find work. Until now, it has trained 560 women and girls. It also helps establish and facilitate women's self-help groups that access loans from the government for income generating activities. According to the NGO, 188 groups have so far been established benefiting 4,817 women.

The organization also assists around 75 villages spread throughout the area by establishing night tuition centres in partnership with AID India. The latter is a large NGO which, amongst other things, aims at improving the quality of education in rural contexts. The sampled organization trains village youth as "motivators" to teach village children Tamil, English and math in the afternoon. An estimated 4,752 children have benefited from these night centres which are usually held at the village temple. AID India has assisted with educational materials and training coordinators who work at the local NGO. The local NGO assists AID India in village level mapping and surveys regarding the quality of education in rural India which is published in the *Annual Status of Education Report (rural)* ASER studies (ASER, 2012).

No other organization or programme was found in the district that could be used as a comparable example. The government NCLP and SSA officers were unwilling to engage with the issue, present data or allow inquiry into their programmes and beneficiaries. Other NGOs did not work directly with bonded labourers.

### **3.3.3 Participant Selection**

Two main groups of participants were selected for the study: those who work with the issue of bondage and education; and those who were previously bonded and had received an education. A total of 12 respondents were selected according to function in the first group (Table 3.1). At the government level, 4 participants are involved in issues pertaining to bondage or education of formerly bonded children. These include the District Welfare Officer who oversees the department responsible for the rehabilitation of released bonded labourers. In the NCLP, the Integrated Child Protection Programme officer was selected since it coordinates activities to address and prevent child labour. A Government advisor from an

international NGO was opportunistically sampled since he was prepared to share information. Lastly, the District Education Officer who oversees SSA projects which target out-of-school children was because former, bonded children are also mainstreamed through its bridge centres and courses.

**Table 3.1 Respondents Working with Bondage and their Roles**

	Government	Grassroots NGO	School/Colleges	Grand Total
Role	Welfare officer	Head of Ngo	NCLP school teacher*	
	NCLP/ICCP officer	Women's group coordinator	SSA school headmistress*	
	Education officer	Head of education	College owner/director*	
	Government advisor *	Education coordinator	AID India	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

Note: \* Sampled opportunistically

The 4 NGO participants are directly involved in working with bonded labourers in different roles. They also represent diverse caste backgrounds. This “typical with variation” sample aimed at providing a richer interpretation of the reality of bondage and education in the specific context. Two of the respondents are from the Arunthathiyar community, one being a former bonded labourer and the other a former child labourer and former beneficiary of the NGO. The other two members are from other communities. One of the respondents has been with the NGO since its inception and had previously been bonded. This respondent continuously provided additional information through informal conversation. The other participants include members engaged in coordinating educational activities, overseeing educational activities in villages, and coordinating activities for women, such as self-help groups and tailoring classes. Because roles are fluid within the NGO, the participant now primarily engaged with women, has been active throughout the NGO's existence with rescuing and mainstreaming children and youth, and follows up and assists college students.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, other respondents were opportunistically sampled to provide relevant information, namely one NCLP teacher, one SSA supported school headmistress, one college director and one AID India worker.

In the second group, of formerly bonded labourers, those selected had to have finished at least primary education which was assumed to have helped them gain an understanding of

bondage, education and its role in their integration into society. The total number of respondents, the kind of bondage they were under, and their education appear in Table 3.2. Students in higher education were assumed to have a wider perspective on the role of education in their lives. The selected NGO currently assists 44 college students of whom 16 were sampled. Two respondents had just completed their education and were looking for work or waiting to receive their certificate.

**Table 3.2 Number of Interviewees according to bondage and education**

<b>BONDAGE</b>	<i>Numbers</i>	<b>HIGHER EDUCATION</b>	<i>Distribution</i>
Agriculture	6	Basic Computer Science	1
Brick kilns	2	Chemistry	1
Flower picking	1	Commerce	2
Rope making	1	Computer Application	1
Scavenging	1	Electronic Communication	1
Silver smith	2	Engineering	1
Spinning mills	2	Engineering	2
Stone quarries	1	Mathematics	5
		Mechanical Engineering	1
		Nursing	1
		Teacher Training	1
<b>Total</b>	16	(10 males and 6 females)	16

A typical case with variation logic was used when sampling college students (Elam et al., 2003) in order to grasp the differences in the types of bondage and educational paths. Most had been bonded in stone cutting, agriculture and spinning mills. The rest worked as silver-smiths, in rope-making, scavenging and brick-making. The sample was designed to include at least two respondents from the different forms of bondage and educational paths. Regarding education, this was difficult to apply since access was easier to some higher education courses than others because the NGO mediated access to private colleges who offered the same types of courses. An attempt was also made to have gender parity of respondents which was difficult for cultural reasons as far as females were concerned.

All formerly bonded labourers were from the Arunthathiyar community. According to the 2001 census, Salem had a total population of 3,016,346 people, of whom around 16%

were SCs<sup>14</sup>. The Arunthathiyar is the second largest SC group in the district comprising some 140,232 people. In the Taramangalam block they total around 51,000 people, according to the sampled organization. The respondents reside in hamlets on the outskirts of the surrounding villages. Some of them were interviewed in the villages, while others came to the NGO centre for interviews.

## **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

### **3.4.1 Data Collection**

The primary data collection instruments were interviews, informal conversations, statistics provided by the NGO with regard to identified bonded labourers, and observations. In order to examine the importance of education by those working with the formerly bonded child labourers, and given the grass-roots nature of the NGO and the issues that emerged from interviews, research instruments were continuously adapted. Although the NGO works with education, it has no educationalist and the pressing issues related more to bondage and caste relations.

Therefore, following Patton (1990), a mesh of informal conversation and open interviews were added to semi-standardized guides in an attempt to have a more thorough inductive and grounded approach<sup>15</sup>. The rationale was that respondents presented different or broader issues than was the purpose of the original interview guides. Therefore, the research transitioned to open interviews with members of the NGO. Some of the interviews were embedded into a type of life story frame since the NGO members are involved personally in the community and its struggle against bondage. Much of the data was collected through continuous informal conversations concerning caste issues related to bondage and general discrimination in society. To corroborate views presented from the Arunthathiyar perspective, secondary literature was consulted as were a professor and a researcher in Chennai.

One interview was done with each of the four sampled members of the NGO. Four additional informal conversations were held with the head of the NGO which were also

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<sup>14</sup> According to the 2011 Census, the figure is 3,482,056 people.

<sup>15</sup> See Annex I for the interview guides for the different categories of respondents.



recorded. Further information from daily conversations was written down along with observations pertaining to the NGO's work at its centre and in the villages. Much time was spent on following various activities undertaken at the centre, such as training of older youth, women's self-help group meetings, meetings with bank officials, and occasional visits to the night tuition centres organized in the villages. The NGO also shared information from their surveys to identify bonded labourers or students that had been released.

With the exception of the advisor to the government on child protection, all public officials were unwilling to be recorded and provided no more than 10 minutes of their time. These conversations were very informal and the interviewees generally claimed the non-existence of bondage. An unstructured interview was done with an SSA headmistress at a primary school and with a private college owner and director, and a semi-structured interview was made with an NCLP teacher.

In order to examine college student respondents' view on their education, the original standardized guide was adapted to allow themes to emerge and a more semi-structured approach was used. The purpose was to create more space for their interpretation of their social reality and to evaluate the role education has had or could have in their lives given their history as bonded.

This was followed by a final section of interviews where a more standardized approach was used to check on elements that could be considered important for their future participation in society, such as political participation or access to sources of information, such as newspapers<sup>16</sup>. Themes that emerged from previous interviews were followed up in ensuing interviews with a more "grounded approach" to probe what seemed to be recurrent patterns, such as the issue of language. The data collected from college students derived from 16 recorded interviews. Two additional interviews with youth were not included in the analysis as their cases, while providing very interesting insights in general, were border line cases. One appears to have been given a higher advance than normal for bonded, and the other was never released from bondage despite having some education.

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<sup>16</sup> See Annex I D for the interview guide.

### **3.4.2 The Process of Transcribing and Coding**

Transcribing was done via an inductive approach to allow for potential themes to emerge. For college student respondents it was important to keep their answers and perspectives on particular issues connected with their life experience of falling into bondage, being released and being re-integrated into school.

Coding was also inductive though, as Bryman (2010) notes, it is questionable if it is actually possible to not have some assumptions in mind when using a grounded approach. Codes were mostly of a sensitizing kind so that data could be organized conceptually for actual analysis and emergent categorization. For the NGO, the issues and their responses could be divided into codes, such as: “conditions of the community”; “educational strategy”; “government issues” and “opportunities post-education”. For college students codes were for example: “family conditions”; “interpretation of bondage”; “access to information” and “political participation”. Although the categories were never used by the respondents, they were constructs that aimed at best capturing what the data referred to overall<sup>17</sup>.

Codes for interviews were assigned based on interviewee characteristics as shown in Table 3.3. These were based on the typology of respondents as either NGO (N), government official (G), or college student (CS). Other characteristics were used, such as the typology of bondage and type of higher education for college students. Only students were coded for gender. In order to guarantee anonymity, coding for the NGO respondents was done generically as “worker 1”, “worker 2”, etc. Informal conversations were given the additional code INF and also numbered.

### **3.4.3 Data Analysis**

Analysis was first undertaken following a non-cross sectional data organization which allows for different conceptualizations and distinctiveness (O’Conner et al., 2003a). Transcribed interviews were analysed one by one and the data was then organized into thematic tables according to general sensitizing or emergent codes (O’Conner et al., 2003b). From these, emerging concepts were written down and compared to those from other interviews. This allowed for a more nuanced picture regarding general themes, particularly with regard to NGO respondents. Some focused on broader thematic areas than others which

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<sup>17</sup> See Annex II A for an example of coded data and emergent concepts.

meant that they presented a richer picture for particular themes. In order to have a more nuanced picture, all respondent views were combined.

**Table 3.3 Interview Codes**

<b>Respondent Type</b>	<i>Code</i>	<b>NGO Function</b>	<i>Code</i>	<b>Government Function</b>	<i>Code</i>
NGO	N	Worker 1	W1	Advisor	A
Government	G	Worker 2	W2		
		Worker 3	W3		
		Worker 4	W4		
<b>Respondent Type</b>	<i>Code</i>	<b>Type of Bondage</b>	<i>Code</i>	<b>Higher Education Course</b>	<i>Code</i>
College Student	CS	Agricultural	Agri-b	Basic Computer Science	B-Cs
Male	M	Brick Kilns	Bk-b	Chemistry	B-Ch
Female	F	Flower Picking	Fl-b	Commerce	B-Com
		Rope Making	Rp-b	Computer Application	B-CA
		Scavenging	Scv-b	Electronic Communication Engineering	B-ECE
		Silversmith	Ss-b	Engineering	B-E
		Spinning Mills	Sp-b	Mathematics	B-Mt
		Stone Quarries	Stq-b	Mechanical Engineering	ME
				Nursing	B-Nu
				Teacher Training	TT

The emergent concepts were primarily sensitizing concepts/analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990). Attempts were made to “reconnect” these to the general theme or broader context through a second conceptualization. Following the critical realist approach, this aimed at theorizing in relation to the context to re-describe the reality from which they emerged. For example, the concept of “vulnerability” and “exploitability” are part of the caste’s broader “relational-position” with the upper caste which is structured in “dependency”.

In interpreting the data much importance was given to the context and secondary literature since many of the educational themes that emerged are tied to issues related to caste and rural Indian society. Furthermore, the analysis of the NGO provided frames for better understanding the respondents that had been assisted by the organization given that the data

offered a wider and deeper understanding of the interrelationship between bondage and education.

### **3.5 Reliability and Validity**

The study does not aim at producing representational generalizations but, if anything, inferential or theoretical generalizations (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). In other words, it does not aim to set in probabilistic terms possible effects of education in terms of integrating formerly bonded child and youth labourers within a broader population group. However, in aiming to posit deeper structures that frame respondents' interpretation, it provides theoretical propositions that might be characteristic of the relationship between bondage and education at the deeper level. If the concepts or explanations arrived at are plausible, some of the key findings might hold true in similar contexts while other, more "peripheral" ones may not. As an example, maintaining dependency is a key component of bondage which purposefully undermines education for the dependent community. This could be inferred to contexts where bondage exists along traditional caste lines and where children are bonded at a young age. This can be reinforced in communities with mother tongues that hamper their access to education, which is likely to be contingent on context and caste origin, but is not necessarily essential to all cases of bondage and educational exclusion.

In terms of validity, whether the criteria for quantitative studies, e.g. to be replicable in their entirety, can be held for qualitative approaches is debatable (Bryman, 2010). Social settings are transformed over time as are understandings of the social world. Research involves social interactions which are likely to vary based on factors, such as level of trust or cross-cultural skills. The study can produce some effect in the social world in which it was undertaken and can possibly raise questions which allow respondents to further their own understanding of their social setting and experiences.

This understanding of validity is more in line with Lewis and Ritchie (2003) who suggest as a criterion the likely recurrence of the original data and the way it has been interpreted. They stress that the sample and design must be unbiased, the fieldwork be done consistently, analysis carried out systematically, and the design/conduct of the study carried out in a way that allows for inclusion of all perspectives.

Not all of this was possible although an attempt was made. The sample design was done without bias and included the most relevant respondents. Even if most government officials were unwilling to take part and provide information, they were still included. The fact that only one organization was sampled has made the study context-specific and limited to one particular caste in the region.

Even though diversity within cases of bondage and educational paths was the aim, this could not be fully achieved given contingencies in the field. While NGO respondents provided ample opportunity to cover relevant ground, challenges were found with college respondents partly because of the need for simultaneous translation. Analysis was attempted to be carried out systematically and much use was made of contextual literature with regard to bondage in rural Tamil Nadu and to the particular caste. Responses provided by college respondents were also set against the analysis of data from NGO respondents who provided a broader picture.

The reliability or “credibility” of the study is based on Lewis and Ritchie’s (2003) criteria of understanding it as accurately reflecting the phenomenon under study. The scholars suggest that this be ensured by the sample coverage, by questions allowing respondents to fully capture the phenomenon, by ensuring that the interpretation is supported with sufficient evidence from the data, and that findings are portrayed in a truthful way based on the original data.

The sample of respondents who come directly from the community of bonded labourers and who work directly with the bounded labourers means direct access to the phenomenon of both bondage and ensuing education. Given more time and better access to other actors, such as factory owners, more willing government officials, and parents, might have led to a more nuanced picture. While NGO officials adequately expressed their views, especially through continuous informal conversations and explanations of the issues related to debt bondage and education, this was more of a challenge with college students although their core thinking and valuing of education did emerge.

There seems, therefore, to be sufficient evidence to support the explanations or the concepts that emerged which reinforce those of the wider literature. The thesis has remained grounded in the data and provides illustrative quotes that show the basis of the constructions developed.

### 3.6 Limitations

The limitations of the study derive from the sensitivity of the issue, ensuing risks, and lack of networks and connections that could have led to interviews with owners of industries, members of upper castes who bond the community and others who could have expanded the perspective on the core issues of the thesis. The sensitivity of the issue appears from the fact that during the first visit to Taramangalam, a person with connection to the justice system had to be present in case the visit caused confrontations with local owners of bonded labourers. The NGO was, at first, uncertain whether visits to other villages could be allowed since this might trigger confrontations. Visits were eventually permitted and were interspersed with interviews at the centre. Parents and family members of students were often reluctant or fearful to share information. Female respondents could for the most part be interviewed only in villages and accompanied by family members. Government officials were generally unwilling to share much information during interviews or provide other data. They did not allow access to any of their programmes.

Another limitation was the simultaneous translation between Tamil and English, and the use of different translators at different points of the research due to their availability. Two main translators were used with a third one filling in when the two were not available. The first translator was an Anglo-Indian from Chennai who had a Bachelor Degree in Social Sciences. While English was his mother tongue and he was fluent in Tamil, at times he struggled with translating concepts into Tamil. The second translator was from Salem city and had done his studies in theology. While Tamil was his mother tongue, he struggled with understanding questions, and particularly with follow ups or probes that were not on the interview schedule which he had reviewed. He also had difficulty translating Tamil answers into English. The third translator was from the community and worked as a college professor in engineering. He adequately understood how to translate concepts but struggled to express answers in English. Overcoming this barrier meant repeating and reformulating questions. Answers and issues that seemed to emerge were always double checked with NGO members.

Given time constraints, NGO members and college students were interviewed in a non-sequential order. Had data instead been gathered from the NGO and analysed prior to interviewing college students, this could have facilitated the data collection process since the

NGO interviews enabled an understanding of what was relevant and what framed students' approach to education.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The study analyses a very sensitive issue involving actors who exist in unequal power relationships. Lower castes are exploited by upper castes in bondage but also suffer forms of discrimination in a range of contexts, including schools. The study was undertaken with the utmost precaution so as not to put anybody at risk. It has respected respondents and their rights to non-participation, to not answer questions, and to withdraw at any time from the interviews.

All interviews were conducted under verbal consent since written consent was seen as binding and looked upon with suspicion by former, bonded labourers and government officials alike. This also appears in other research, for example Riessman (2005). The purpose of the study was explained and all personal details were anonymized. All former, bonded child labourers were above the age of 18. All interviews were done in culturally appropriate settings - male respondents for the most part at the NGO centre and females for the most part in villages, amongst family members and no later than eight pm.

The visits to the villages were always undertaken with members of the NGO present to avoid tensions with members of upper castes who bonded those from the villages. The students' past as bonded labourers was never discussed at the school or college visited as this could lead to their stigmatization.

Within these limitations, it has nonetheless been possible to provide additional knowledge on the relationship between education and bondage for the Arunthathiyar in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu which is scarcely researched. To help interpret this relationship, Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration was used. Its core thinking appears in the next chapter.

## 4 Analytical Framework: Structuration Theory

In order to investigate at a deeper level why bondage tends to perpetuate itself at the cost of education, and why education can potentially help bonded break out of conditions that lead to bondage, some key concepts from Giddens' (1984) structuration approach to social reproduction have been used.

### 4.1.1 Unpacking Structuration: Understanding Social Reproduction

One of the key dimensions of Giddens' theory of structuration is that it aims at explaining the reproductive character of social activities. This is primarily understood as a process whereby agents reproduce the conditions that enabled their activities in the first place. To do so, there is both a syntagmatic patterning of social relations where situated practices are reproduced across space and time, and a paradigmatic dimension whereby this reproduction always implicates its mode of structuring (p. 17). The mode of structuring which enables social relations across space and time is also reproduced by these relations to guarantee their continuity.

This paradigmatic dimension or "modes of structuring" is further characterized as structural properties or structural principles. These, in turn, are explained as the rules and resources which are drawn upon in social action and, precisely for this reason, are the means of a system's reproduction. In other words, as noted by the author, structures are recursively organized rules and resources implicated in social systems: situated activities of humans in space and time draw upon and reproduce them.

This leads to the following distinctions: 1) "structures as rules and resources which are properties of social systems"; 2) "Social systems as reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practice"; and 3) "Structuration as the conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures and therefore the reproduction of social systems" (p. 25). For this study, bondage is understood as being structured in the relationship between the Arunthathiyar community and the upper caste communities: a social



system of reproduced relations and regular social practices. It therefore has definite structures (rules and resources) and conditions that lead to its continuity or transmutation.

Giddens (1984) further breaks down rules and resources. A general definition of rules is the “techniques or generalizable procedures applied in enactment or reproduction of social practices” (p. 27). They are the frame of reference for social practices which, according to the scholar, are understood at a more profound level of “practical consciousness” and not necessarily accessed at the level of “discursive consciousness”. These are what allow people to “get on” with life, and are part of their stock of knowledge. They are further characterized as modes of signifying and of normative sanctions or legitimation.

To these rules as signification and legitimation, Giddens adds domination instead of resources. This leads him to characterize the structures of social systems as Signification and Legitimation (the rules) and Domination (resources). It appears as though they are set apart logically and analytically but they imply one another in reality. According to Giddens “resources are focused through signification and legitimation”; and the signification or making of meaning is tied to legitimation and domination. It is important to note that signification is set in agents’ interpretive schemes which are used in social interaction particularly through communication, and is part of the stock of knowledge, while legitimation is found in agents in terms of norms and manifests itself in interaction through sanctions (p. 29).

Domination can be seen in social interaction through power and is understood as the condition for the existence of codes of signification. In fact, Giddens suggests that frames of meanings incorporate the differentials of powers and that normative sanctions also express structural asymmetries or domination. Furthermore, this third structural property can be broken down into two dimensions of resources or what Giddens considers typologies of resource mobilization: 1) allocative resources - “forms of transformative capacity by generating command over objects, goods and materials”; and 2) authoritative resources - “types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors” (p. 33). These, however, only become “resources” when they are actually incorporated in the way systems are structured through signification codes and normative sanctions.

#### **4.1.2 The Relevance of Structuration Theory for the Thesis**

Some of these main concepts employed by Giddens are relevant for our purposes. The way social systems are “structured” or constituted, and extend over time/space is tied to the way social actors relate to one another as they engage and transform the world. Three essential elements are necessary and interconnected: the mediation of material resources to engage meaningfully (‘allocative’); the directionality of transforming these (the ‘authoritative’); and the overall frame of meaning that justifies the way the former two are set by also locating them into a wider social project or engagement in the world (‘signification’ and ‘legitimation’). In other words, the structures of social systems which are drawn upon in social activities and are reproduced are those that determine how resources are mediated, how opportunities to transform these in one’s engagement with the world is organized and directed, and how the former two are justified within a broader frame of a total social project of being in the world.

The way individual members from a social group find their being in the world is, therefore, tied to the way resources and opportunities are socially mediated and the way these are determined within frames of meaning and legitimation. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the way a community from a given caste can have access to resources and opportunities - such as labour and credit - through an upper caste, and the way they relate to these through meaning and legitimation. As discussed in Chapter 2, SCs in rural contexts have not only had the most precarious forms of employment, but have also been targeted for bondage. There is every indication that bondage is tied to the way resources are distributed to these particular groups. In Chapter 2, it was also pinpointed that since caste-based subordination is accepted, the frame of meaning for lower castes legitimizes the way resources are distributed through bondage. In examining one sub-group of the Arunthathiyar caste within its historic dependency on upper castes, such as the Gounder farmers, one notes how these structures played out in social relations and tended to maintain themselves. It seems as if, historically, the primary way the Madari had access to resources was through this powerful group which determined the terms of mediation. This was also set within their frame of meaning accepting their low status and social role, and perpetuating their dependency for an extensive period of time.

The way resources are distributed and appropriated through meaning and legitimation is precisely what ensures the continuation of social activities. For example, if a scheduled

caste has access to resources primarily through daily agricultural wages, given that they do not own land, are discriminated within the labour markets and do not have access to education, this group would continue to work for daily agricultural wages. Even more so, they may assume that this is precisely their legitimate role in society. The same concerns debt bondage. In fact, as was highlighted in Chapter 2, it is the SCs that have been most dependent and continue to find themselves in debt bondage, although in new forms.

Besides caste based relationships, education can also be seen as an opportunity and resource that is mediated and set within a system of meaning and legitimation. It is a socially distributed public good. The way one interacts with education is based on the terms of access to it and the frame of meaning or legitimation that surrounds it. For example, one can understand education within the idea of rights and the possibility of equal opportunities and mobility, or the need for skilled workers for the economy. In undertaking an education, one can aspire to a different set of ways to further engage in the world, such as through engineering or nursing. This is likely to be a different frame of meaning and justification than, for example, caste based roles, since they are based on skills and merit, for example. However different social systems, such as education and caste based village relationships, can interact and have a relative impact on one another. While governments can provide public schools, lack of resources can lead to dependency on upper castes for resources and hence bonded relationships. Or caste status can translate into discrimination in schools or the curriculum can seem irrelevant for the traditional occupations of scavenging.

The issue at hand is, therefore, what happens when education is “freely” provided to a group that is traditionally bonded? To what extent can this resource lead to different resources and to a different way of understanding one’s social role? Can it entail shifts in resource allocation and in the system of meaning? Can it change social relationships by allowing this group to relate on different terms to groups who mediate opportunities through bondage or daily agricultural work? This could lead to some form of change at the structural level. The thesis therefore proceeds by looking more specifically at how bondage, as a system of resource distribution and meaning, affects education and why education is sought as a way to break out of this system of bondage.

## 5 Community Conditions: Bondage and Educational Deprivation

Why is education valued by the selected NGO? What role can it potentially have in the life of former, bonded labourers? These questions are examined first by looking at the way bondage affects education. Through the interpretations of NGO respondents and formerly bonded labourers, bondage is identified as a deeper social relationship that must be grasped in order to understand how education can have a role in the life of the formerly bonded.

### 5.1 Views on Debt Bondage in the Community

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the Arunthathiyar caste is one of the three main SCs of Tamil Nadu and is found particularly in the Western part of the state. Historically, it appears to have been the most dependent and least able of the SCs to position itself and achieve some kind of mobility. This also seems to have characterized the reality in Taramangalam. Their conditions in 1998, before the establishment of the NGO, were described by its founder as follows:

NW1 - INF 4- *The whole village was under one person's rule. He would give everyone 10 rupees and they would all have to work in the forest under him. If you did not work on his thing, [his] forest, immediately that night people would get beaten, their bones would be broken. He would not only give them 10 rupees, every day he would give them a glass of ARICK [the purest form of alcohol, extremely strong]. He used to give them 2 litres and one glass of sarai, and 10 rupees. That was their salary. Teenage girls, boys, mothers and fathers, the only food they had was this alcohol to drink.*

*Every village she went to, there were bonded labourers, child labourers [...] when she was working she went to one village and the same thing that happened to her [bondage] happened to each and every person of that whole village [...] this whole village was mistreated and misused. It seems these people would just walk in and have their time with the women. If the woman's husband, father, brother, someone comes and sees this person's footwear outside the house, they turn and they walk away.*

It also seems that the Arunthathiyar in this region have not been able to integrate and take advantage of new industrial opportunities. According to the NGO interviewees, the majority either work in agricultural daily wages, bondage or scavenging. Most college students indicated that their parents worked for daily agricultural wages or were still bonded.

At the time of the fieldwork, there were still approximately 418 identified bonded labourers<sup>18</sup> who had not been recognized as such and released by the government. They include families, couples without children and singles. Most of the identified and unreleased workers fall into four main categories of labour: stone cutting; brick making; sugar cane; and agriculture. Stone cutters worked either in Bangalore which is the capital city of the state of Karnataka, in the State of Andra Pradesh on the northern border of Tamil Nadu, or near Chennai, Tamil Nadu's capital, which is about six hours drive away from Salem. All three destinations mean that the bonded labourers have to migrate. Likewise, those who worked with sugar cane did so in the district of Erode to the south-west of Salem District. The rest were bonded within Salem district either in Taramangalm or surrounding blocks.

The youngest bonded labourer identified before 2012 was 7 years old. Approximately 94 were 18 years or younger, while 297 were between the ages of 19 and 59 (Table 5.1). Another 20 were 60 years and above. The average age of becoming bonded was 16. The average age of those who are currently bonded and under the age of 18 is almost 15 years, whereas the average age when their bondage began is much lower, around 9 years (Table 5.2).

**Table 5.1 Age of and Duration of Bondage of all Labourers, years**

	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Age of Bonded Labourers</b>	35	33	33
<b>Duration of Bondage</b>	10	15	17
<b>Age when Bondage begins</b>	10	14	16

Source: Data provided by the sampled organization for 2012

**Table 5.2 Age and Duration of Bondage of Labourers up to 18 Years Old, years**

	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Age of Bonded Labourers</b>	18	15	15
<b>Duration of Bondage</b>	5	5	6
<b>Age when bondage begins</b>	10	9	9

Source: Data provided by the sampled organization for 2012

The average beginning age of 9 years, for those under 18 years, highlights the likelihood of low educational levels attained by child bonded labourers from the community. The Seeds (2010) study on the rehabilitation of formerly bonded labourers also points to the fact that the majority of them (63%) were illiterate, while 25% had less than a full primary

<sup>18</sup> This figure is a rough picture of the reality of bondage. It does not capture those who have been released, those that might not have been identified as bonded labourers, and those who could be at risk of falling into bondage.

education (grades I-V), and only 12% had completed primary. It is also probable that the current duration of an average of 6 years of bondage for those aged 18 years or younger undercuts the opportunity for continued education whatever level had been achieved. The average of 17 years points to the extended period of debt bondage. According to Seeds (2010), the majority in Tamil Nadu had been in bondage for five years or more: less than 5 years (20%); 5-10 years (44%); 10-15 years (25%), more than 15 years (11%)<sup>19</sup>. Low entry ages and a protracted period in bondage points to the nature of this phenomenon; it can undercut education and maintain members from this community in conditions that will continuously lead them into bondage. This appears more clearly from the way the NGO understands the community's social position.

## **5.2 Social Positioning: Resources, Meaning and Bondage**

### **5.2.1 Accessing Resources at the Expense of Education**

The community's "positioning", particularly with regard to the resources or opportunities it can access compared to other groups, was presented by respondents from the NGO as a key to understanding its reality. A contrast was made between this community and other SC communities in terms of their differential access to land, education, government jobs and political participation - the first three pointing to resources or opportunities necessary for secure employment. This difference was put in stark terms since the community basically had none, leading it to be characterized as the most vulnerable and more so than the Pariyar and Pallar. Moreover, its lack of access to resources as a group was interpreted by NGO respondents as maintaining it in this very position, even though state provided education is available. As expressed by an interviewee:

NW1 - INF 2 - *Last one is Arunthathiyar, they can't even come up in their life. These people are really on the down floor, they don't have even enough food to eat so in all these problems they never think of their studies, so they never go for their studies.*

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<sup>19</sup> This study calculates the average time in bondage only of those who have been released and rehabilitated primarily through government intervention.

This position is even more problematic compared to the “upper communities” or the castes that are well off. In this case their position is not one of vulnerability “compared to”, but vulnerability “to”. It is the upper communities who control land and employment, and are able to mediate resources and opportunities through insecure forms of labour, such as daily wages and credit for debt bonding. This enables their command or power to direct the way in which the Arunthathiyar engage in the world through labour. This is also structured by caste mentality which allows for slave-like treatment of the lower caste. This is clear from the way members of the community enter into bondage:

NW1 - *The people are economically and financially very poor. The higher people they... give less than money [extremely low pay] and ask them to do more work, more night and day, and don't give proper food and water.*

*Those who are high people, the rich people are thinking of those low category scheduled caste: 'these people can be treated like handymen'. So they are given more work and less pay. They will give some credit, like 10,000 rupees but the interest is doubled. They collect more interest interest interest but the main amount is theirs [the borrowers]. But they collect only interest. Lifelong they [low caste] spend their time there [working]. [They are] not able to [get a] proper education. Not able to [have proper] food also. They [referring to upper caste] are thinking that they are slaves. They are made as slaves. After that they are beaten, [receive] kickings.*

This also appears in college student respondents' interpretation of taking advances and thereby becoming bonded. While they presented nuanced views, most highlighted their families' financial vulnerability as the key motivation. One respondent referred specifically to the fact that their “low” caste is treated as such by the upper castes. Another one tied it explicitly to the community's identity and reality; the Madari (Madhari or Arunthathiyar) are tied to this kind of labour because they lack access to resources and opportunities and are forced to work in precarious employment, and to enter into bondage:

CS9: M Stq-b/ME - *Normally my type of people have money problems, they don't have enough money for food or for basic necessities. They don't have money to study or do anything else. So normally they go to work and they get bonded like this. This is the type of work they do. [...]By saying “engla-madri” I am saying [meaning] caste, I mean my community and poor people as well.*

Through controlling and mediating resources, the upper communities are interested in the power it gives. When lending money and collecting only the interest, as also attested by the wider literature, their purpose is not to get the loan paid, but rather to control labour (De Neve, 1999). In fact, as the previous quote suggests, the upper community is able to control a person's life; hence those of the lower community “spend their own [life]” working for those

of the upper community. This, in turn, translates into how this lower community structures its engagement with reality: as “bonded” or completely under the power of the upper community. This allows the latter to not only dictate the conditions of labour, but to do so in very abusive terms - all legitimized by the low status of the Arunthathiyar caste. College students realized that this meant losing their freedom and experienced this as a slave-like condition highlighting the power over them:

CS5: F Agri-b/B-Mt - [...] *it's like slavery, it's like buying a person's life. By giving an advance and taking everything of theirs. And putting them through all this misery and pain. I've been through that, I don't want to see anyone else go through that.*

As this structured type of relationship that entraps a community's engagement, bondage can simultaneously undercut education which is a diversely mediated resource or opportunity with other end goals for their engagement. In fact, bondage of children is not merely a by-product of community or parental bondage. Instead, as members of the community, they are likely targets of bondage through their families with the explicit purpose of curtailing their education to keep the community under the same conditions.

NW3 – *And the other caste people are like: “oh if they get educated we are going to suffer” so they keep them down and keep this thing going. They need labourers and servants and since these people don't have the means they get them the money [loan] [...] fathers and mothers too old so they take the boys and girls; mainly the boys and girls.*

Thus, as interpreted by the NGO respondents, in order to maintain their hold on the Arunthathiyar, upper communities are willing to bond children and thus reproduce the relationship between these communities. This “keeping down” or low is much in line with what historically has characterized the relationship between the Madari and the Goundar as explored by Cederlöff, (1997). One study in Andhra Pradesh (NLI rural wing, 1977 cited in Burra, 1995) also argues that child bondage explicitly happened at the expense of education. According to the owners of bonded labourers in that study: *“Once, they are allowed to come up to an equal level; nobody will go to the fields. Fields will be left uncultivated everywhere. We have to keep them under our strong thumb in order to get work done”* (op. cit., p. 542).

College students expanded on this point. They indicated how bondage was an “enclosing” experience that constricted them to the world of work at the detriment of understanding the wider world, developing their potential, and accessing other kinds of employment outside of bondage and precarious forms of labour, such as daily wages. This, in turn, means cutting them off from having a better, or a different life from that of their parents:



CS16: M Agri-b/B-E - *In the law it says it is illegal, because if children are working, then their future will be spoiled, [Since] they don't know or gain any general knowledge, the children always work, so even they don't have knowledge of worldly things; instead they concentrate on their work, so there is no opportunity for them to have a good life.*

CS5: F Agri-b/B-Mt - *[...] I wanted to study. Why do I have to do this? I was helping my parents, but I was really hurt, I want to study, I want to be like everybody else. From small I wanted to study and come up in life. I wanted to change the way my family is, the work that they do. I wanted to bring about a change in my family and that is the reason I always had an interest to study.*

Even though it is difficult to know if this female respondent had this understanding at the time of bondage in standard two or towards the end of bondage in standard six, it shows how bondage is understood as cutting off what education can offer. Without changing the conditions which lead to actual bondage – positioning of dependency for resources and opportunities - it persists. Becoming *de facto* bonded keeps people in their traditional social position.

Because bonding at the cost of education is tied to caste relationships, it is encouraged not only by those who seek bonded labourers for their enterprises but by the broader community. Besides forms of exclusion in schools and colleges, the NGO has also noted resistance against its own work to assist youth educationally, which is tied to maintaining caste based differences and hence the Arunthathiyar's low position:

NW1 INF 2 - *We can't conduct the coaching centres here, in this place. If the Arunthathiyar students come here for their education and coaching, people from the surrounding society, the house owner, they won't allow the Arunthathiyar to stay here and learn because they are excluded. Because they keep their standard.*

## **5.2.2 Accepting Resources at the Expense of Education**

There are aspects of the Arunthathiyar mentality that allow for bondage and which sanction their current social position at the cost of education. In fact, despite the existence of education and positive discrimination because of government initiatives, the community's horizon for engaging in the world is structured by traditional social roles. This is an essential part of reproducing their social position as, amongst other things, it frames the way education is understood and evaluated. This leads the community to explicitly accept bondage and deprivation of education.

NW3 - *Parents don't have any awareness, they have always been like this, and they have never been of help they just don't know what they are doing. They are uneducated. Their parents have been bonded, their grandparents have been bonded. So they continue the trend.*

Parental mentality - in this case expressed as lack of awareness - is enclosed in the frames of an "historical" existence in bondage and lack of education. Given that their engagement has been structured that way for generations, they perpetuate it. Members from the community appear to accept their position of subjugation since it mediates resources to them. As one respondent explained:

NW3 - *Parents are like "as long as we get money, we are happy we don't mind doing anything, whatever they say we are ready to do, we have got our money, this thing this money has helped us in this way, these people are giving us money". So the parents are not able to talk to the people who have given them money, they are not able to question them. Nothing. All they have to do is "good morning Sir, what do I have to do today". Even if their children are sexually abused, they can't ask, even if his wife has been sexually abused he can't say anything.*

Although the NGO has undertaken "awareness" programs, the community's "horizon of engagement" is still tied to their traditional caste based social roles of bondage, cleaning and burial of dead bodies. Aspiring for construction work is considered a huge step forward and a mind-set transformation. It is likely that this "closure" of horizon logically means that other means of engagement, such as education and positions of higher status are also outside their bounds.

NW1-INF 2 - *We have done awareness with [on] education, [caste-based] discrimination but nothing seems to be working. These three things they [members from the community] only know how to do, probably: being a bonded labourer, they can clean toilets and all that, or they can burn dead bodies. These are the only jobs they can do properly. A few of the youth, what she has done, she has changed their mindset and got them into construction work. Something to make a difference in the community.*

Education is viewed by parents as beyond their children's grasp, as it was for themselves. This view is reinforced by children's learning difficulties, particularly due to the community's mother tongue (as discussed later). They can be seen as incapable of learning and therefore better off working. College students and NGO members further underlined that parents were unable to value the future benefits that education could bring because their mentality is tied to the immediacy of basic existence. Since education is an unknown reality for parents, their perspective is also limited:

NW1 - *Basically the parents [are] not educated. They don't know the value of education. They are thinking "education is very hard, it's not for us." They know eating, sleeping, going and coming. That's it. And die only. They don't know about [having] future goals. So education, they*

*are thinking it is very hard. It is not an easy thing. That is why they are thinking it is a new world. They were in slavery. They are not able to come out of that mind-set, their perspective is very poor [limited].*

The horizon of engagement for this community is, therefore, bounded by the frame of reference represented by their continued bondage and the caste based relationships that uphold it. Bondage is an accepted social role while education is not valued but instead seen as beyond the grasp of children. While parents do send their children to school, they are likely to bond them when the need arises.

The bondage of children, in its turn, helps reproduce the same frame of meaning. It shapes children's interpretive frame because it prevents them from gaining a deeper understanding of the world and how to be in it. This is more likely for those who were bonded at a very young age, such as those in silversmith or stone breaking. For them, the closure of bondage seems to be fuller in the sense that, although they are aware of the existence of schools, their horizon of experience and opportunity is tied mainly to the world of work. One respondent noted that even becoming aware of actually having been "bonded" only came later, after being mainstreamed into school.

In contrast, those bonded at an older age already had educational experiences and a larger opening to the world. This is most likely a continuum where a student about to enter into college would have a wider and deeper horizon than a student in standard two. In these cases, bondage is not only an issue of labour but also of having one's engagement in the world constricted compared to the wider horizon already acquired. This can be compared to the strongest example of extreme closure into bondedness - a respondent who laboured from a young age in stone quarries:

*CS9: M Stq-b/ME - When I was breaking rocks, that was my world. I didn't think outside that, I didn't know what life was going to be outside that. Now that I'm out of breaking rocks, it's like a totally new world for me. A totally different place, now only I realize this, so much in this place. The difference in my life is, if I was still working there, I would feel that that was nice, I would feel that that was my life. Now that I'm out of it I feel that there is so much more to life, apart from breaking rocks [...] From a small age I was with them, I didn't go to school, since I was with them I did not know what was going on, so I just continued working.*

Children and youth were, therefore, characterized by NGO workers as having the same mentality as their parents. One respondent added how bondage was exacerbated by village life and closure from wider experiences. He explained how

children's development was hampered, and that after being released they also suffered from being restricted within the village and having their relationships only within that community. This constrains their understanding of the world and their wider engagement with it:

NW4- *That time [in bondage] their mind was not finished. [They were] not able to think that much when they were rescued out of that [bondage]. His world is there. They won't be fearless [...] they are staying home, they are staying in their village, they won't come into the city or some other place. They are living in a small circle. That is a problem. They don't know the outer world. They are living in the same place. They are linked with themselves, inside, they are locked. They are not able to come out; they are not willing to come out.*

The bondage of parents and children, particularly at a young age, is therefore likely to reproduce how members from this community are engaged. This is reinforced by the distance which separates the villages from the wider context and limits their experiences and knowledge of the world.

## 5.3 Conclusion

For the NGO, the role of education in the life of formerly bonded labourers is always set in the context of the community. Bondage, educational deprivation and future opportunities are tied to the reality of the group and its relationship to other castes. This relationship determines the way resources are mediated through dependency at the cost of education, and is set in a frame of understanding that accepts such mediation.

Part of the answer to the question as to why education is valued by the NGO and the role it has in the life of formerly bonded is that bondage reproduces itself at the expense of education in order to maintain the social position of the Arunthathiyar. Education would have the opposite effect, namely to help free the group from this position and reduce the likelihood of its reproduction, as will be explored in Chapter 8. Before doing so, the way the NGO attempts to mediate opportunities of education will be examined in view of shortcomings of government interventions.

# 6 The Role of the Ngo: Mediating Resources and Opportunities for Education

The NGO and college students understand bondage in the context of the community's limited resources and as limiting access to educational opportunities. When releasing bonded labourers and preventing children and youth from being bonded, the NGO primarily focuses on guaranteeing educational opportunities, partly in view of limited opportunities provided by the government. Its perspectives on its own role and on that of the government, is discussed in the following.

## 6.1 The NGO's Perceptions of Government Limitations

The main provider or mediator of opportunities or resources to the formerly bonded labourers is the State. The government is the prime responsible for releasing, rehabilitating and mainstreaming child bonded labourers into school according to the *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976* and the *National Policy on Child Labour 1987*<sup>20</sup>. It also has policies such as the SSA in place to ensure education for all at lower levels and positive discrimination to provide opportunities for SCs at higher levels. The NGO helps the community access these opportunities and gives additional support to ensure that they can be fully utilized. However, the government is perceived by NGO respondents as having two shortcomings in its programmes which allow bondage to continue: non-recognition of the problem; and inadequate implementation of initiatives that could assist bonded child

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<sup>20</sup> For the full *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976*, see:  
<http://www.humanrights.asia/issues/right-to-food/jurisprudence/india/bonded-labour-system-abolition-act-1976.pdf/view>

For the *National Policy on Child Labour 1987*, see :  
<http://labour.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Divisions/childlabour/PolicyofGovernmenontheissueofChildLabour.pdf>

labourers, in particular the NCLP and SSA programmes. These, in turn, are interpreted as being tied to deeper issues of facilitation and complicity.

Addressing the reality of bondage is extremely difficult since its existence has to be verified through surveys and, in many cases, requires direct government intervention against the owners of the bonded labourers. Parental awareness alone is insufficient and migration of bonded labourers makes it even more difficult to identify. According to one respondent, most bonded labourers are identified by the NGO during festivities when family members and parents return to the community. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that the existence of bondage is not recognized in the first place and that, therefore, surveys are either not undertaken by the government or the contents of those undertaken by NGOs are disregarded<sup>21</sup>. Given that the identification of bonded labourers is the basis for interventions and precedes release and ensuing rehabilitation through education, providing the evidence is extremely critical.

*NW2 - NGOs and government are not getting along, because government is saying, there is no bonded labour, and they [the NGO] are saying: here is proof there is. The government does not want to do much [...] The government is trying to report [that] there is no child labour even telling us there are only 400 child labourers in all. The reason why they say that, their staff don't go and take surveys, how many children from this tribe, how many from this [...] Because they don't do their groundwork properly they just claim "that is all we have". And when they [NGO] say no you are wrong, that is a problem.*

With regard to child labour, during the NCLP intervention in the early 2000s<sup>22</sup> in the surrounding villages where the NGO works, a respondent noted that there was a tendency to suggest lower figures for child labour and not conduct surveys in particular villages. While this could not be corroborated during the field visit, an evaluation of the NCLP in the district of Salem notes a discrepancy between the 2003 SSA figures used by the NCLP of only 7,957 child labourers and the 2001 census reporting around 27,589 child labourers in the district (IDA, 2008).

Besides the issue of the actual number of child labourers, the non-recognition of the problem of bondage by the government is a reality. This is apparent from interviews with officials at the district level. Most were unwilling to discuss it and were steadfast in stating

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<sup>21</sup> It is standard procedure for all NGOs – including international ones – that they present proof of bondage to the government. Based on this, the government intervenes to release and rehabilitate bonded labourers. Proof includes information on the advance received, the time working and calculation of the daily wages received.

<sup>22</sup> The NCLP has been functioning in the district of Salem since 1996.

that bonded labour no longer exists. The Welfare Officer in charge of the rehabilitation of bonded labourers was clear in stating that for over two years there had been none in the district. A colleague of his asked me directly: “show us where there is [bonded labour]” in a provocative and sarcastic tone. The Officer at the NCLP and Integrated Child Protection Unit was also very resolute in stating that there are only 400 child labourers in the district, of whom none are bonded. The official NCLP data confirm this figure. The SSA Officer explained that the Department focuses explicitly on out-of-school children and drop-outs, and that it has assisted in reintegrating recently rescued children from cotton picking, none of whom were bonded. None of the officials were willing to provide data or permit me to visit their programmes in the Taramangalam block.

However, an advisor to the government on child protection from an international organization was willing to meet outside the office at his home. He clearly stated that the government knows of bondage and, yet, does not explicitly recognize it and pursue its eradication:

*GA - There are bonded labourers [very adamant tone]. Maybe I can say there is none. I should not pretend. What I feel, you should accept the problem then you can find a solution. If you say there is no problem how will you find a solution? We should accept the problem. We agree there are bonded in brick kilns, then we will see how we can eradicate. If you say there is none, how can we eradicate?*

Thus, although the problem is known, it is not recognized and addressed. According to the Advisor, the government intends to develop strategies for improved child protection and undertake future raids on pockets of child bondage.

The NGO indicated that the government’s unwillingness to recognize the existence of child bondage of this particular caste facilitated their continued bondage. A respondent, who belongs to another SC, confirmed the existence of bondage of the Arunthathiyar:

*NW2 - [...] the person from the welfare department said, “There is no one from SC who is bonded.” He is saying: “I got bonded labourers from other castes, but not from SC who has been bonded.” When he said that, I got hurt. When officials say that other castes but not this caste, I got hurt seeing that there is something wrong, someone is wilfully not doing their job, someone who is actually encouraging this to happen. Government surveys are always different from NGO surveys.*

This underlines what Srivastava (2005) suggests: the low visibility of bonded labour is linked to their low social status and, therefore, the wider social-cultural reality that allows it. Facilitating bondage or not pursuing its eradication also appears from another respondent’s

experience in the SSA and public schools with which he collaborated. In this case there were risks when addressing the issue of bondage because high level government officials were directly involved because they personally or their family members owned production units employing bonded labour:

*NW3- Teachers see that every day, they know there is bonded labour. But they can't do anything to help the children. If I was in the school there would be a problem, I can't rescue, I can't help. So I left the school to come out. Because of me no staff member gets into trouble. Like I'm helping, they shouldn't get into trouble and lose their job, so I came out privately and came into an NGO. And it's mainly SC children.*

*NW3 – The ministers, the Heads, all the parties they have to look after that particular place, so since they are looking after the place, it's not safe for the school if he says there is bonded labour here. They will make a big problem, or destroy the school or do something. Everything is under their control, they lose out on money and get angry and then [...] Panjayat heads, MLA - Member of Legislative Assembly, if there are 5 or 6 blocks, it is in his control [...] The MLAs, their family members, they all own bonded labour units. He has ties with MLA in Bangalore who owns these units [...] So they have a big tie and there is a big link, like a chain in which they give people here, people come from here and go there, and they make their money. And so if the school says there is something wrong "ok there is bonded labour children"; that's it!*

Although this could not be corroborated in the field, literature has pointed to difficulties in eradicating debt bondage because of corruption and government members' involvement (HRW, 2002; Sivrastava, 2005; Guérin et al., 2007). If this is truly so, not only do local upper communities pressure lower communities into bondage, but those in political power impede government schemes that could assist bonded children from functioning.

This also appeared to be an issue with regards to releasing bonded labourers. According to the NGO, owners are willing to challenge the release of bonded labourers either by bribing or by attempting to use the police force to their advantage (see also e.g., Guérin et al., 2007).

*NW2 – [...] some of them [owners] cause a lot of problems and take them [NGO members] to the police station. Some will be like, "ok fine take them [the bonded] back", others say "how can you say that, I pay them the money"- [they] take the NGO to the police station and fight, not only that; they say "we will see who wins, you or me? We will put a case and see?"...*

Government programmes, therefore, seem not to be effective in targeting bonded children or youth of this particular community. Non-recognition of the issue at higher district levels, inaction at local levels, participation in bondage by members of the state administrative apparatus, and corruption of mechanisms for release are all barriers against



identifying, releasing, and rehabilitating bonded labourers. State interventions are, therefore, neither impermeable, nor have they managed to overcome or deeply transform the structures of the social relationship between the upper and lower communities. The NGO's role as a mediator is, therefore, crucial to identify bonded labourers and to advocate for the need of government intervention. This is particularly important as access to other opportunities, such as education, hinge on identification, release and rehabilitation.

## 6.2 The NGO's Post Bondage Strategy: Sustaining Education

Besides assisting with identification and release, the NGO serves primarily as a mediator or facilitator of resources and opportunities which are for the most part offered by the government. In this role, the NGO takes the place of those who offered resources for the purposes of bonding and attempts to guarantee sustained access to education by overcoming risks or pressures of re-bondage and child labour. Since children and youth are bonded via the family, the NGO attempts to mediate resources and opportunities for parents and to change their mentality through awareness. The organization focuses on parents because mainstreaming children into school without addressing the family conditions of bondage is insufficient. A first step is to help parents understand the opportunities that are offered by the government and how this can change the way they are engaged in labour. As stated by the NGO:

*NW2 - First we go to the villages, we talk to the people [villagers], we tell them about their development, [we do] awareness. So we find out where they are bonded. First we talk to people and spread awareness, we tell them: "Do not get into bonded labour, instead get a loan from the government, if you get a loan from the government you can pay it back slowly, you can start your own job, you can start a different trade, you can change the way you all work and pay back the loan, you can pay it back slowly." We spread awareness. After that the truth comes out: "oh this person is in bondage, this person's children are in bonded labour this one is in child labour" So that is how we get the information.*

When parents are released from bondage, the NGO attempts to mediate access to land, employment and to a bank credit for women's self-help groups. This is fundamental to preventing re-bondage and maintaining children in school. Coming out of bondage does not mean coming out of the community's position of being asset-less and resource-less. Unless some other opportunity is mediated, re-bondage is a likely option:

NW1 - *After that [being released], if you [a former bonded labourer] live like this, again you are able to go into bondage. That is why [the NGO] introduces some companies for work, daily wages. [The NGO] will introduce them to the steel plant or small companies.*

Women's self-help groups are particularly important in situations of financial shocks to cover health and educational expenditures. Illness is a common cause to push children into bondage as they either have to help repay a loan for medical expenditures or work in the place of a sick parent. Access to safe credit and financial knowledge of savings is, therefore, paramount to sustain education<sup>23</sup>. Ensuring that children stay in school lowers the risks of bondage or child labour.

The NGO's educational strategy is to ensure that children and youth have an education up to college level. It does so in four main ways. First, it mediates access post-bondage to schooling through government bridge courses, through private tuition centres or directly to public schools. In general, it pursues the government option of bridging via SSA or NCLP. In particular cases, given the age or extension of bondage, private tuition centres are also used<sup>24</sup>. Upon completion, the NGO ensures that the children are mainstreamed into public schools. In more extreme cases, other NGOs or organizations are asked to help, for example with boarding for orphans.

Second, the NGO also mediates access to private colleges by negotiating entry through its "social capital" and securing available seats. This is done through the spouse of one of the members of the NGOs who is a teacher. A few more seats are secured in other colleges through awareness:

NW1 - *[Entering] Government colleges [is] not possible [for most] because of marks. These former bonded labourers, they want to study, [but] the mark is very low, very poor mark. So government [college] not interested to admit. We approach the private college. Because of [NGO members'] influence they are [accepting] the students [...] The main reason: [NGO member] is doing social work. Second thing is face value: they know very well [NGO] is bringing good students only to college. After that, doing some awareness in private colleges. So they know very well about [NGO member] and giving admissions. X College is ready to take 40 students because [spouse of NGO member] is working there. So [through] that influence they are taking 40 students. No fees, free admission, only exam fee.*

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<sup>23</sup> During the field work I observed meetings with bank officials and women's self-help groups and job interviews held at the NGO for work in hospitals as janitors. This type of employment is tied to caste identity as it relates to the "unclean". However it represents a secure form of employment particularly for illiterate adults.

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly so for youth who have been bonded for an extremely long time or are too old to be integrated via NCLP and SSA (age of 14 years).

This is important because most students cannot enter free government colleges due to their marks and would not be able to pay for private ones. However, not all students require or chose to use them. A couple have marks for admission to government colleges, while a few chose colleges with yearly fees that the NGO assists in covering by finding sponsors.

Third, the NGO works to mobilize and mediate resources to ensure continued access to education. This includes covering costs both inherent to schooling, such as exam or bus fees at higher educational levels, or food and clothing for children. In this way the NGO assumes the responsibility of the parents and helps guarantee another way of being outside of bondage:

NW1 INF 2 – *When they leave bonded labour they need food. They have to give them a place to stay. [The NGO] assures the parents: “we will take care of your kids completely, we will see to their uniforms, their food, their books, their study, till they are married we will take care of them”. They assure their parents that. The parents don’t care for them. Even the writing part for the exams they get it for them. Government material.*

This complements what the state already provides at the primary level of education: one free meal; books; a uniform; and, if necessary, transportation and at upper secondary and tertiary level: scholarships for SCs which amount to 6,000 rupees<sup>25</sup>. The NGO provides clothing, shoes and toiletry which are provided by local donations from the rich and shop owners whom the NGO attempts to involve in the plight of the community in order to overcome the association of this caste with being unclean. Exam fees at the end of lower and upper secondary education and in college represent a large, yet important, cost for the NGO since they are needed for continued access to higher levels of education or course completion. At the college level, the NGO complements government scholarships by securing scholarships for males from a Salem business. The NGO seeks other donations as well and in extreme cases members pawn their own valuables, such as gold.

Fourth, in the early post-bondage stage, the NGO provides its own educational service in night tuition centres to improve the quality of education and facilitate learning for village children. These are established by mobilizing resources at the Arunthathiyar community level in terms of teachers or “motivators” (many of whom were previously bonded) and through a national NGO (AID India) that focuses on improving quality of education at the village level. It provides pedagogical materials, training and pays the salaries of three coordinators.

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Rupee is the equivalent of about 1.6 cents of the US dollar. The scholarship is around 97 US dollars a year.

The night tuition centres were created primarily to fight the push towards re-bondage or child labour by tackling three major barriers: the lack of interest in education given the time spent in bonded labour; the differences between mother tongue and language of instruction; and the parental mentality towards education:

NW1 INF 1- *The purpose of this night education is to generate an interest for the children to study; number two, to create an awareness for the parents to know what the children are studying and why they have to study. If they study well, there is less or no chance that they fall back into bondage.*

By using alternative pedagogies through songs and games, the centres focus on individual students and on increasing their interest. They also aim at facilitating learning by concrete demonstrations rather than overly abstract explanations. Related to both, overcoming the language barrier is a key dimension of the night centres' work. This is particularly important because learning difficulties stemming from language are a major push for bondage and re-bondage.

NW2 – [...] *most of the children they don't understand Tamil and they get homework and don't know what to do. The next day when they go back to school the teachers are beating them stating you are useless you haven't done your homework. Because of that most of the students stop going to school, because [they think]: "I haven't done my homework, I don't understand the language". So they loiter about and that is how they get caught for child labour and bonded labour. That is the reason why they started these tuition centres.*

NW2 – [...] *what the parents do, the parents think: "My child can't study, the child is useless". Because they are not able to study in Tamil and the parents think: "My child is useless my child can't study" and gives them to all these bosses and child labour happens.*

There are three interconnected ways in which the language barrier facilitates bondage: 1) it can become a factor of exclusion and push-out through teacher abuse; 2) it can cause children to resist continuing in school because of frustration and the low perception of their abilities; 3) it can reinforce parental mentality that education is too difficult and inappropriate for their children. The night centres assist with Tamil to facilitate learning, give children confidence, and bring awareness to parents by changing their perceptions of their children – which aims to prevent children from being re-bonded:

NW2 - *And what happens is, when they teach them at these night tuition centres, when they teach them Tamil, the next day the children go to school with full confidence stating, 'I know what it is that the teacher is teaching, I can teach the teacher that'; they have full confidence knowing that, 'yah, I'm good at that'. So they are building that step by step. That is the main reason for the night tuition. That way the bosses are not able to get these children.*

*The parents and the villagers are also learning from this. And because they see the interest that the children are taking sitting in these tuition centres they see the interest the NGO is taking to even have these tuition centres. All that has impacted them, it changes the way they think; instead of sending their children [into bondage], they can see their children learning and enjoying themselves.*

Given the community's positioning, it comes as no surprise that the primary role of the NGO is to work as a mediator of resources and opportunities. These are provided for the most part by the state and are offered with other ends than bondage. Education seems to be the most important one and many additional resources are mobilized to ensure it. However, in attempting to sustain education there is an important risk which the NGO can do little about: that of caste-based stigma, discrimination and abuse in schools and colleges. These affect particularly female students and lead them to drop out:

*NW1 INF2 - When friends come to know about it – there is a chance that they drop out. [...] As soon as she mentioned that she is from this caste, immediately all the other students heard she is from this caste, and if you are from this caste you are from a bonded labour background. So they started annoying her and calling her some names that are bad in Tamil. So that girl dropped out.*

*NW1 INF 3- Especially three students were raped and killed, because at the college they are looking at their backgrounds, whether this girl is coming from a bonded background or something. As they saw the background, they raped the girl and killed these three girls.*

The NGO can only attempt to circumvent this by hiding student identities. But it hopes that the benefits of education will also bring changes to deep-seated cultural norms.

## **6.3 Conclusion**

The NGO's strategy and its interpretation of government shortcomings have stressed two important points. The vulnerable positioning of the community requires that others take up the mediating role in offering resources and opportunities which lead to a life outside of bondage. This includes social opportunities and services offered by the government and actually accessing them. Education is the most important opportunity offered by the government. Other resources that the NGO also mediates help ensure that children are able to benefit from education as a basis to change personal life circumstances and deep-seated norms in the community. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

# 7 Breaking Bondage through Education

In the following a more in depth analysis of why education is valued by the NGO and the role it has in the life of formerly bonded will be pursued. It explores why the NGO pursues education for formerly bonded labourers up to tertiary levels and how this is seen by college students as potentially improving their personal lives and wider circumstances.

## 7.1 Educating for Changed Social Positioning

Sustaining access to education is at the core of the NGO strategy, not only to help the individual child or youth, but to address the roots of the community's proneness to debt bondage. It is understood as the key to breaking the conditions of bondage - the broader social realities that lead to it - by helping students to secure employment outside of dependency on upper communities. In achieving this, those who are no longer bonded offer examples of the value of education and its potential, encouraging changes within the community by expanding their "horizon of engagement". Community mobility and social transformation is, therefore, sought through education.

This understanding of the value of education was clarified when respondents explained why the NGO invested so much in it instead of assisting older students to find work. The importance of enabling children to aspire for an education and to study is tied to developing a higher degree of independence and ability to be engaged outside of bonded work:

*NW2- It's not the age for them to learn work, it's the age for them to study. Instead of teaching them how to do some other work we put them in school, they study hard, they can start a company of their own and they can teach others how to work and they can do it the right way. For example: Instead of them going to work under someone, the more they study the more they get educated, the more they go to a college, they can become a manager, they can teach people how to work the proper way, they can be an example and say: see I was like this and now see how I am. So they are trying to empower the children, not to teach them to work under someone but to become someone in life.*

College students likewise see education as essential to get “good jobs” or “high jobs” and a better life. To them, there is no other way to “grow up” or move out of conditions that lead to bondage:

CS13: F Agri-b/B-Ch – *As they were teaching her the 1st standard school [material], she got [thought to] herself like ‘anyhow there is no other way to grow up in her life, so study is very important, so she found out that at any cost I need to learn. Each and every word.’ So she got her encouragement from the teachers, then she began to study and began to grow in her studies gradually.*

CS16: M Agri-b/B-E - *Education is very important because, [my] parents are bonded labourers. In bonded labour we cannot find a better, good life, so if you want to have a good life, you need to study more, well; and through this education you will get a good life. If you have a good education then only will you have a good job. Even if you go out, if you have good education they will offer you a job.*

As the respondent notes, the enclosing reality of bondage which characterizes his family provides no way out. But education means access to different kinds of employment or “good jobs”. Its “positioning” role, in the sense of enabling access to labour markets outside of bondage is, therefore, paramount to breaking out of the community’s social position. For the NGO, if this is achieved, it has the potential of setting an example for the community on “how to work”, not in subjugation or “under”. Attaining positions through education transforms both parental views of what it can offer and children’s views that have been structured by caste:

NW2- *The reason why he is doing that is because there are a lot of people, especially SCs, that have been treated badly from small, they are not... like they are scared of everyone because of their caste. When they try and study, when they educate them, when they start working in a higher position, it changes. If one person changes, he can change everyone else and that is the reason why they work on them and try to concentrate on education and college.*

NRW- *It starts off like this, when they are in a higher position, the parents look at them and say, “Oh this person’s child is a manager because they made him study. See our children were working, that is why they are in this state.” So that brings an awareness in the parents for them to start sending their children to school, to start educating their children, it changes their entire mindset and the way they think and that brings about a change [...] So they are trying to bring a change in the way people think.*

As indicated, to ensure security and transformation through position, the NGO focuses on education of children and youth up to college level. College education is seen as increasing the probability of better employment as it is a must to overcome caste-based labour market discrimination and to access higher level jobs in the area. According to one of the NGO

respondents, the Arunthathiyar need to have higher levels of education in order to compete for jobs which other castes are able to get with lower levels of education.

This was corroborated by college students who believe that they must “position” themselves as high up as possible through higher levels of education. Many have pursued college level education because upper secondary education is insufficient to get good jobs. Others aspire to continue their education up to Master level to access a wider range of employment opportunities, higher forms of employment and additional government and civil service positions.

*CS3: M Ss-b/B-Mt - He wants to improve the quality of his education because plus 2 - upper secondary education - is not enough to get more opportunities. So he wants to improve his knowledge and his education, to improve his qualifications.*

Besides its direct role in improving employment opportunities, college education has other related benefits. The NGO believes that discrimination in the local surroundings can potentially be overcome by migration. This is more likely with a college education since graduates have better English language skills than if they had only secondary education. Related to the idea of migration, college education is considered by the NGO as a way to help broaden students’ mentality and aspirations to move away from the village setting.

*NW1 INF 4 - If you finish grade 10, they are not giving jobs. In my community, we finish our degrees and we don't get jobs. Other communities finish grade 10 and they get jobs. We finished our degrees and we don't get jobs. So [the NGO] we send them far to like Bangalore where they can get jobs. They have a degree, go get a job. [They] know some other NGOs, and tell them “this person has a degree” and they get them jobs.*

*NW3 - [...] it also helps children think, “Why should we sit in this village and look at each other? I can go to different places, I can go to Chennai and get a good job, I can go to Chennai and work” [...]*

In addition, it provides better protection from the risk of re-closure into the village world for female respondents. This is tied to early marriage and the loss of the usage of the State language, Tamil, falling back instead on the use of Telegu.

The NGO, therefore, aims at achieving mobility and social change for the community through one process: educating for better positioning or transforming its positioning. While extended education can lead to employment outside of bondage and further economic security, it can change the community’s understanding of how it can be engaged in the world.



Likewise, students desire to change the way they and their family have been engaged in the world through extended education, given its instrumentality in positioning.

Paradoxically, coming from the lowest caste in Western Tamil Nadu and from extremely deprived and vulnerable conditions, these formerly bonded respondents are pushed to the highest levels of education possible to overcome their background. Unless they are able to position themselves through higher levels of education, they continue to be in a very fragile and bondage prone position. There seems to be no middle ground. In fact, some college students pointed out that should a bonded parent become sick, they would have to return to bondage themselves to pay off their parent's debt.

## 7.2 Being Educated: Transforming Engagement

Education can also help change the way formerly bonded engage in the world. From college student respondents' views, it appears that education can transform the frame of meaning or horizon of possibilities for engagement, enable different engagements by providing necessary skills, and legitimize engagement by tackling caste status issues.

### 7.2.1 Framing for Engagement in the World

Being educated offers the potential of transforming the way the formerly bonded children envision the way they can engage in the world. The experience of being in school and receiving an education has opened students to an understanding of its value and role in society. The first respondent below was bonded at a young age and for an extended period of time. Being mainstreamed into school meant opening his horizon to education itself, and how foundational it is for someone's life:

*CS9: M Stq-b/ME - So I knew nothing about studies, but after I started learning, I learned education is the start of our life. Children have to stop going to work, start studying for their lives to change and for their lives to become better. So everyone has to study.*

Another respondent highlighted how returning to school helped him understand its role in securing better types of work:

CS14: M Bk-b/B-Com - *Like after going to school, he found out that the very important thing is education. If you get a good education you go for a good job [...] if I had been bonded, I would not have had knowledge of good education, and would not have gone for the good job.*

In school, respondents are able to understand different employment opportunities and how to position themselves for these. This means knowledge of what further education is necessary for particular sectors of work. For example:

CS14: M Bk-b/B-Com - *I would have been in the bonded, I would not have had knowledge of education in the sense that there are different areas. If I study this one, I can get this type of job. But after going to school and getting knowledge, if I study this particular study then I will get this particular job. This kind of knowledge I got.*

Understanding what education means in society therefore opens respondents' horizon and has the potential to change the way they have traditionally been engaged. This transformation is pursued by the NGO and is also the result of being in school and learning its role in society. In turn, this has given many respondents the desire to seek changes for their community at large. Many have the aspiration to teach children of their caste, which some do already as "motivators". This is tied to their experience of having been bonded and then mainstreamed into school, which has enabled them to teach and transmit knowledge. A respondent exemplified how her personal experience motivates her to help members of the community to have an education:

CS6: F Bk-b/B-Mt – *In my childhood I was a slave. As I am teaching, I am thinking children should not be slaves anymore like me. For that reason I am teaching children to not be slaves, get good knowledge, good education – assisting children and transforming the community.*

For the time being this is perhaps the only way respondents can actually envision assisting their own community as this is the only resource or asset they have. They all hope to be financially secure one day so that they can help their family members and prevent child labour and bondage. This generation of released bonded labourers seems to break dramatically with their parents' generation. Bondage is no longer accepted as a form of engagement.

## **7.2.2 Enabling Engagement in the World**

Education not only changes the frame for engagement in the world but also enables such engagement by providing the necessary capacity for change. Acquiring knowledge of

this world and how to engage in it is important. Knowing about one's world and society and having access to information about it is crucial to broadening frames of meaning and enabling participation. Bondage does the opposite:

CS3: M Ss-b/B-Mt – *If I am in my work place [bonded labour], I only know the work, I have no chance to learn other things apart from the work I have. But in school I have the chance to learn, to read newspapers, the chance to discuss with friends, many chances to think about other things. So education, learning will improve my life.*

Many college student respondents noted this when characterizing their parents' lack of knowledge of the world around them. Education also enables respondents to reflect, exchange ideas, seek information via newspapers and analyse their own reality. Being able to understand and reflect on one's world is paramount to being in it and "managing" one's life within it, as another respondent noted. Education opens respondents to the wider social world around them, outside of their traditional village and bonded reality and leads some to continue seeking deeper knowledge of their world:

CS7: F Sp-b/B-ECE - *While I was studying in school and college, I learned, I want to get knowledge of different parts of the world through the newspaper, through the news [...] I want to know what are the things happening around the world, and how many people are suffering just like me.*

CS1: M Agri-b/B-Mt – *I want to understand about the world and knowledge. What is happening in the surroundings I learn through the newspaper. I am interested in political [politics].*

Whether through newspapers, books in libraries or by continuing college, respondents seek to increase their understanding of the world. For some this can be historical understanding, political participation, general knowledge of the world, and functional skills for employment. All of this is possible only through acquiring the official state language of Tamil. In a sense, becoming literate in Tamil becomes foundational for respondents' ability to function in society. It gives them increased independence and spatial mobility which provides further opportunities to grow and learn:

CS3: M Ss-b/B-Mt: *Wherever we go, we want to go, we have to know something. Education, if I have education, then only I know the things. For example I have to get a bus to go to some place, if I have no education I have to ask some people or depend on some people. If I am educated I can go anywhere. If I go anywhere I can learn things, I can improve my life.*

The example of increased mobility through literacy was common. Being connected to urbanized centres through buses is important for respondents given their isolation in villages and shows how education helps functioning independently:

CS8: Rp-b/TT - *Education is very important, without it, he would not be able to get a good job, do anything. Because of education he can actually read things. He can read signs, he can read buses, he knows where to go and how to go. Education in this period, this time, it is the most important thing. Without it, you are no one, you are nothing. If there was no education he would be asking people for things. But now when he goes out people ask him, does this go there? People who can't read ask him things.*

Though the respondent takes the example of transport, the point is how foundational education is for functioning in society. Other examples by the respondents regarded the ability to independently access and interact with financial services and government schemes:

CS11: F Scv-b/B-Nu - *If she goes to school to get some transfer certificate or other documents, the teachers or people will ask questions of her parents. Her parents will keep quiet. But she will answer. Her parents don't know how to respond to their questions. So all this sort of stuff she has to do. Not only transfer certificates but most things. If she goes to some of the offices, like the collector's office or some other government office, she has to ask for the community certificate, she has to get it from the government. She also has to take her parents as well to get their income certificate.*

Respondents are able to use financial and government provided services and assist parents primarily because of their literacy. While parents do speak and pick up some Tamil from surroundings this is insufficient. Almost all college and Upper Secondary Education students receive scholarships as SCs and, therefore, have access to these via bank accounts. Through these, students also learn how to interact with banks and how to manage their money:

CS14: M Bk-b/B-Com - *When we get the salary, we know how to handle money. For unnecessary things we don't need to spend it. If I had been in bonded labour, me or my parents would get money, but would not have knowledge of the value of money. [I would] simply spend it. So after going to school and college he learned how to manage money in the right way.*

In addition and related to literacy, learning English at colleges increases chances of finding employment in the private sector, and makes it possible to interact with those outside the state of Tamil Nadu. This makes it potentially possible to seek opportunities outside the state. Likewise, learning to use computers can be understood as an important dimension of respondents' functional literacy. Upon entering college, most respondents receive a laptop from the Tamil Nadu government which they learn to operate for their specific purposes. This

includes skills, such as programming or soft-wares for their future professions in commerce or accounting. They also learn how to use the internet to access information and develop a wider understanding of the world. Some have received computers but have not been taught how to use them. Others have computers at their colleges but no access to them.

Education has also led to political participation. Most, if not all respondents, were aware of their role in choosing leaders for the country through voting and those who had received their voting certificate would use it in the upcoming elections<sup>26</sup>. They all indicated criteria for choosing candidates based on what these had done, particularly for the poor or low communities. Knowledge is gained from colleagues and other sources of information, such as the television:

*CS1: M Agri-b/B-Mt - Those who are doing good things for people, he selected them. [...] First they had 5 years of experience. What they have done, good or bad, how was the first 5 years ruling this country, he is analysing this and then voting. Yes he discusses with colleagues.*

*CS5: F Agri-b/B-Mt – It's everyone's right. She will vote for only those who are fighting for the good of the country. [...] The only way she finds out, right now there is a ruling party, they are doing some good. Before that there was another. Whoever does the most good, she votes for them. That is how she finds out.*

*CS8: M Rp-b/TT – You can only vote when you are 18 years old, when you are mature enough. He will only vote based on which party has done the most for people, which party has helped the people the most, he will vote for them.[...] He watches the news a lot and based on the news, they tell whether this politician has brought this act, this one has done this, based on that, and it will also tell how much it has reached people. So based on that he will vote.*

The fact that respondents are aware of their rights to vote and intend to do so may indicate a greater participation in society. Moreover, their ability to analyse and select representatives could potentially benefit their own community and be a way of improving the caste's social position. It could also be a stepping stone for future greater involvement in local democracy.

### **7.2.3 Legitimizing Engagement in the World**

Besides transforming and enabling engagement in the world, education can also help former, bonded labourers to engage in the world by challenging what legitimizes their

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<sup>26</sup> The 2014 Indian general elections for parliamentary constituencies.

traditional bondage. It can do so by helping them overcome caste based low status ascriptions and change behaviours and norms which reinforce them.

### **Increasing Recognition and Respectability**

To respondents, it was crucial how being educated and/or achieving a good “position” would lead to respect or “recognition” from upper castes and from within their own community. This was suggested by many and was tied to improving their “low” caste status and overcoming being regarded or treated as slaves - bondage being the epitome of non-recognition.

*CS5: F Agri-b/B-Mt - If she was at home and in bondage, no one would have looked at her. She would not have even gotten any respect.*

*CS6: F Bk-b/B-Mt - If there is no study, there will not be any respect. If you have good education people will respect you. And people, you can gain good jobs as well. That is how study will help in her life. [...] People always look for a good position. If you have a good position in life, people respect you. If you don't have a good position or reputation, then people won't respect [you]. In order to come up in her life, she chose study to get a position in society. If she doesn't study, the people will not give any respect to her and think she is a slave.*

*CS7: F Sp-b/B-ECE - Her caste is SC, so normally people never respect the SC. That made her move forward in her study, because if she studies, goes for further education, people will respect her, she will get a good response from people and she will get a good position.*

It appears that - besides being the only option to find secure forms of employments – education is also the only way to improve caste status and lessen the legitimacy of bondage. As noted earlier (Beck, 1972), many castes in the region, except this one, had used education to improve their status. Given this community's asset-less and resource-less situation, education is the only means to provide social standing through diverse types of employment. It is also through education that many respondents arrive at this understanding:

*CS 11: F Scv-b/B-Nu - When I went for the school, I learned how important study is in society, because in society they respect people who have good education. From that I came to know how study is important in society [...].*

Another way in which respect or recognition can be achieved is through gradual transformation of behavioural patterns and norms associated with the Arunthathiyar's low caste status. Education has assisted respondents in social interactions with the wider community, particularly in communicating with upper castes. Respondents pointed to the

socializing aspects of what they learned in school in terms of how to behave, communicate and “give respect”. The key issue for respondents was the need to be decent, respectful, to know how to address different groups of people, to control one’s language and to not drink. They noted that through learning to behave appropriately they are able to give “respect” and to receive it. This makes them appear as educated and calls for respect and recognition:

CS14: M Bk-b/B-Com - *After going to school I learned how to talk with people in society respectfully, if someone is coming to us, how we should talk to them politely. After getting knowledge, an education, people realize that this guy is educated, so while speaking with others they will come to know how well an education he has. Education, it teaches how to talk, how to obey and behave, give respect to others.*

One respondent further exemplified this by noting the difference between himself and his parents in terms of being able to converse without being vulgar:

CS16: M Agri-b/B-E - *My parents they don’t know how to behave with educated people and uneducated people. For example, they speak with uneducated people without respect, and the same talk when they meet educated people, they talk with disrespect as well. It is like their nature, it is not like bad, but it’s their nature. [...] My parents don’t give respect to educated or uneducated people. They will not give respect but after going to school [I] know how to respect and talk to people with respect. Usually when conversation is going on, they use vulgar words; that is how they won’t give respect.*

The value of learning not only communicative and behavioural skills but also being presentable in dress and manners can be understood against the backdrop of this particular caste. NGO members noted five commonly held characterizations of the Arunthathiyar by the wider community: their language is uncivilized and vulgar; they are prone to alcoholism; their families are dysfunctional; their children are uneducated; and their wives are mistreated by husbands and sent into prostitution. Behaving properly, therefore, helps respondents overcome caste prejudice and stigmatization. As the NGO noted, if students are well kept and clean these are less likely to be spotted as a SC. Mingling and interacting with upper castes could potentially change upper caste prejudices.

The importance of behavioural change is tied to being able to relate in the wider society in a way that dissociates the respondents from the “low” status applied to the Arunthathiyar. It could, therefore, assist – at least potentially - in overcoming caste based bondage conditions by improving their identity as a low, degraded and exploitable group, although this would take time.

## Understanding and Challenging Inequality

In addition to improving respect and recognition, education can also provide awareness of the injustices of caste treatment, that castes should be viewed as equal and that subjugation should not be accepted. This is exemplified by one of the respondents in relation to social science teaching:

CS8: M Rp-b/TT – *He learned about society, about the different evils in society, and how only education can help get rid of this. Example: the lower caste and upper caste, women being the weaker sex and lots. There was a subject called social science and he learned that.*

All respondents concur that, in school, teachers encourage them to not become child labourers or lead a life similar to that of their parents. However, they were never taught about debt bondage and the reason for its occurrence. Coming out of that reality and having an education has given students an understanding of the caste issues tied to it:

CS13: F Agri-b/B-Ch- *Her parents don't know about the world and society and how people will behave because they don't have good knowledge and education. She has come to know about the society and community, how she should respond and behave, through education [...] Her parents have not come out of the place where they were working, so the owners will, if her parents ask for some water, then they will give some like how we would pour the water for the dogs. So they treat [you] in such a way. Even she faced a lot of problems. But when she came out from that place, for studying, then she understood the people, the society behave like this [...] now she got some knowledge about society: Those people will always treat this kind of caste people very badly. So this system is following. These people are following this culture this system. [...] When she went back to the place where she was working, they will not give proper respect, she understood this community, society will behave towards us, treat us very badly. That is where she learned it.*

In contrast to her parents who are enclosed in their world of work and bondage, this respondent has been able to understand or become aware of the (mis)treatment she underwent as “caste based”. She has come to locate her experience within the wider cultural caste system and that her caste will always be mistreated. This represents a deeper understanding of the social world within which she is located. Education can help questioning traditional caste identity and social roles by understanding the caste system and its injustices.

Another respondent noted that education has enabled her to have confidence and to not “put herself under” upper caste communities as she has become aware of the equality of all humans and of various laws against caste-based discrimination:

CS17: F Fl-b/B-E - *“[...] And they are very afraid, my parents very afraid of upper community persons, because they are having more money, like that we have to go under them, like*



*that they are thinking. They are taught that also. But I know in studies also, we are learning more about under community person, so I can face them. Straight forward, I can face them. I don't have fear. If they are having money, they are only going to get the benefits. Why I have to fear? But my parents thought, it is not like that. They are simply thinking they are more money persons; we have to go under them. From tradition my parents' thoughts are like that, in the village also, from the start itself, from my grandfather's generation. But because of my education I study only that. [...] We are studying social science, lots of laws, awareness about laws, awareness about people, about independence, self-respect. Everything I studied in social science. [...] Child labour, Sir, she don't know particularly that law, but she knows law does not allow any bondedness. Our teachers also taught that everyone is equal; in society everyone is equal, because we have school uniform and everything is the same for upper community and lower community. From that we can know.*

The awareness from education about caste issues is contrasted with traditional village mentality of “going under”. Education has the potential to “break” the mentality of earlier generations that has accepted subjugation and caste based treatment, such as bondage. These changes are not necessarily brought about only through what is taught, but also by facilitating interaction amongst different castes in schools. As one respondent notes:

*CS14: M Bk-b/B-Com - If I had been bonded I would never have known about the caste. In the sense: the people usually keep a distance from SC low caste. But after going to school, I mingle with friends and there I came to know that there is no difference between low castes and other castes. So usually they mingle with all kinds of caste people.*

Education is seen as breaking the “distance”, at least from the perspective of this community’s mentality, by allowing them to see themselves as equal and able to interact with peers from upper communities.

## 7.3 Conclusion

Education holds the potential to help members of this community move out of the conditions that lead to bondage. For this reason it is valued by members of the NGO and has played an important role in the life of college students who were once bonded. Education is an opportunity to position oneself for resources as it provides access to labour market opportunities beyond the traditional ones for this caste. Changing these opportunities helps break the relationship of dependency and bondage and the way members from the community position themselves. To ensure these opportunities to a greater degree, college education is sought as it increases employment opportunities and mitigates the chances of remaining tied to village life or falling back into bondage.

Formerly bonded labourers also regarded college education as providing them with an opportunity to move out of their traditional occupations and assisted them in improving their caste status. Education has helped change students' understanding of the need for equality between castes and overcoming injustices based on exploitation and subjugation. Their aspiration to change the way they engage in the world is supported by their improved literacy and a better understanding of their world which also enables their participation as citizens.

## 8 Conclusion

This study has addressed the gap in current knowledge on the relationship between education and bondage. It has explored the role education has in integrating formerly bonded children and youth into wider society. Two main research questions have guided the investigation that has been done within a critical realist frame applying a qualitative research strategy:

- 1) Why is education valued and prioritized by those working with formerly bonded labourers?
- 2) How do ex-bonded child labourers interpret the role of education in transforming their lives given their own experience in bondage?

Data from the field and wider literature led to key themes which shed light on the way education can assist formerly bonded children and youth in integrating into Tamil society, and to a deeper conceptual understanding of the relationship between education and bondage. Bondage has led to excluding children from education; but education also has the potential to assist children getting out of the conditions that lead to bondage. These conflicting forces can be understood through the application of key concepts from Giddens' theory of structuration (1984).

One key theme concerning the reality of SCs in rural contexts regards the way in which their traditional dependency on upper castes has shaped the way they access new opportunities brought about by industrial changes. Unless dependency is lessened by social policy, increased infrastructure, proximity to cities and other similar factors, SCs are likely to be exposed to the worst forms of labour, particularly debt bondage, which perpetuates traditional caste based village relationships. The Arunthathiyar are prone to this given their historic dependence. Education is one dimension of social policy which can potentially lessen dependency as it increases its outreach to rural SCs in Tamil Nadu. Issues such as the quality of education, labour market exclusion and financial shocks of poor families are factors that limit the role education could have.

## 8.1 Structuration: Dependency at the Cost of Education

By exploring the Arunthathiyar community, the role of dependency in curtailing educational opportunities through bondage has become clearer. At Taramangalam, this community continues to be engaged in the world primarily through precarious employment and bondage because of its structured relationship with upper communities and its reproduction. The relationship is based on a high degree of power asymmetry given that the allocative resources are all distributed to upper communities which have huge authoritative resources as they mediate the latter and set conditions by which the Arunthathiyar engage in the world. All of this is set within a frame of meaning which structures how the Arunthathiyar envision and carry out in practice their engagement in the world. For this community, bondage rather than education is seen as their way of being in the world. This is tied to the caste system which legitimizes differentials in resources and opportunities and the caste's ensuing exploitability and exploitation, including sanctions in forms of discrimination in social settings, such as temples and even in education. This can be interpreted as a punitive mechanism reinforcing the position of dependency and bonded labour proneness.

These structural principles lead to a social system whereby Arunthathiyar dependency leads to de-facto bondage which ensures continued dependency and keeps the cycle going. Being resource-less leads them to work in precarious employment or bondage which maintains them in that position and under the power of upper communities. As this is tied to the frame of signification by which the lower community has accepted its ascribed role in society and its life in bondage; the same follows for children. Parents know exactly what they do within the structures that frame their social interaction. Guérin (2013) notes that bonded labourers are not merely passive, but also interpret bondage in terms of protection and other aspirations, such as increasing integration and consumerism. Their stock of knowledge or the rules of how they should be engaged are bound within these structures, and education as a way of being socially engaged in the world does not enter into it. As they have not gone to school for generations, this pattern of thinking is reproduced. Since they do not have the resources needed for schooling, education is also beyond the possibility of their children. They reproduce the structures or frames of social interaction which characterized their own

positioning for resources and life chances. This is reinforced by upper communities' desire for the perpetuation of this system, and their push for child bondage at the cost of education.

These structural dimensions affect a fundamental factor for change: the State. The government has permitted an environment where these structures continue and has in some cases been complicit with bondage. Those who hold resources have the power to use them at governmental levels to maintain bondage.

It, therefore, comes as no surprise that in tackling bondage, the NGO attempts to overcome or change some of these structural principles. It serves a mediating role for resources and opportunities outside of those mediated by upper communities. It also attempts to transform the codes of signification or mentality of at least the lower community which accepts and perpetuates this type of relationship. More importantly, it sees education as a primary means of accomplishing these changes. Education is an opportunity that is unmediated by upper communities and can lead to the expansion or diversification of resource mediation through employment outside of bondage. It also provides the opportunity to challenge the signification and legitimation dimensions, changing mentalities in terms of caste and how one should position oneself in the social world. Education is, therefore, valued by the NGO under these terms: providing change at the level of resources, signification and legitimation. This explains our first question as to why education is valued and prioritized.

## **8.2 Education and Structural Changes**

It is through students' interaction with education that a change can come about in the way this caste interacts with the wider social reality, or other social systems than bondage. This can potentially happen since education can transform the structures in which the community is set and interacts. If members of the community can position themselves and engage the labour market based on credentials and skills acquired, and find "secure" jobs, this could lower their dependency on upper communities. This is another way of accessing resources and therefore lessens upper communities' direct control, a change in terms of allocative powers. Ensuring a closer integration into labour markets outside the traditional village relationship of dependency and bondage can help change the structures of their social

relationship. It explains upper communities' resistance to their education as this would translate into a loss of cheap and readily available labour.

Tied to transforming access to resources are also changes that education can, or can begin, to bring about in relation to signification and legitimation. As noted, parents accept bondage as their plight, are willing to be under exploitative conditions and submit children to the same at the cost of their education. Respondents who have undergone education have expanded their horizon of engagement in the sense of both understanding that education is a possibility and a must for them, but also that there are other occupations outside the traditional caste-based ones. The way one should be engaged in the world, or be socially active, is no longer framed in terms of advances and bondage, but in terms of education and the route to employment. This is also tied to understanding caste-based issues and overcoming legitimation and sanction based aspects recognizing, for example, the equality of castes and not being "under" the upper communities.

Education also assists in overcoming some of the sanctions in terms of discrimination and social distance by providing a degree of respect and change of some characteristics associated with low caste status. It provides the necessary knowledge for engaging in the world in a different way, at the same time lowering social distance structured in geographical and linguistic terms. In particular, the acquisition of Tamil and English allows for a deeper integration in terms of communication and access to other services, such as government schemes, banking, transportation, sources of information and political participation. These are tied to enhanced possibilities to gain different resources, particularly allocative ones, and to change structural principles which frame their actions. They also assist in the transformation of authoritative resources and signification; enhancing the capacity to grasp one's social world and better project oneself in it.

Education has therefore contributed to transforming the frame of meaning for engagement: enabling different forms of engagement; legitimizing different forms of engagement; and guaranteeing a different form of engagement. This provides the answer to the second research question and is much in line with what was found for the first research question.

### 8.3 Change as Potential or Real?

How can education contribute to the integration of formerly bonded labourers? One should note that the system of bondage is related to an array of systems, such as capitalistic production, the State, education etc. which also bear upon this community and the upper communities. However, bondage as a social relationship appears to be the strongest and most foundational system for the community. Although new rural industries are tied to capitalistic expansion, it is bondage that determines the terms of incorporation into it. Likewise, although state provided education has had a strong presence in the State of Tamil Nadu and the district of Salem, bondage has influenced and continues to influence the extent to which the Arunthathiyar in Taramangalam are able to benefit from it.

Their relation to other “systems” is, therefore, mediated primarily by their dependency on upper communities. Its reproduction appears to keep the community socially distanced from interacting, at least under different terms, with the other systems, such as accessing jobs, schools, information etc. By transforming frames of meaning for engagement, enabling engagement, legitimizing engagement and assisting in guaranteeing a diverse form of engagement, education seems to lead to fuller integration into other social systems. It allows former, bonded members to first envision their lives outside of bondage and become integrated into society, provides them with functional and social knowledge to do so, and assists in overcoming punitive practices which sanctioned their participation in the past. One could, therefore, make the case for the importance of education in changing the means by which members of this community are integrated into society.

The actualization of these changes, and the possibility for long term social change in the principles that frame the Arunthathiyar’s social reality are not a given. It does not seem likely that caste identities, sanctions in forms of discrimination, and fragmentation of the labour market along caste lines are overcome through higher levels of education and within one generation. Not finding employment is a stark possibility, but attempting to do so because of education is none the less a start. Changing the way the community engages in reality, no longer through bondage but through education, might produce results in the long run and move the community out of its positioning and enclosed “bonded” situation. For formerly bonded labourers this appears to be the only option to pursue: greater integration through

education against the permanence of vulnerability to reproduced social roles of precarious employment and debt bondage.



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# Annex I: Interview Guides

## A. Interview Guide for Officials

1. What is the overall purpose of the xxxx –
  - a. How does it work to reach children here in Salem?
2. Why do you think children in general are not in school and working?
  - a. How does their background influence this?
3. What is the process of getting these children back into school?
  - a. Challenges?
4. Who identifies them? How do they get put into school?
5. What type of assistance do they get in school? (keep in mind –are there special things for child labourers?)
  - a. Educationally?
  - b. Financially?
  - c. How far does this assistance go? High School, College?
6. What challenges do you think they will face in staying in school?
  - i. How can the state help? Them maintain access?
7. Do you come across a lot of children that were not only child labourers – but were in debt bondage? Through advances?
8. Are there any particular challenges in identifying and mainstreaming these?
  - a. Does this program/intervention do any work with parents? Awareness?
9. Why do you think it is important to mainstream them into the public education system?
  - a. How important will it be for their lives?
10. What do you think they need from education to be less vulnerable to forms of exploitation?

## **B. Interview Guide for NGO - Programme Level**

Questions to NGO programmers – School principal

Introduction – Context

- a) Perhaps if you could just describe what your NGO does in general- what does the intervention consist of?
  - a. Why this approach?
- b) What is the overall purpose of the intervention?
- c) What characterizes the families/children that are in bondage?
  - a. Caste? Tribals?
  - b. Migrant?
  - c. Livelihoods before bondage?

Main questions

- 1) In general - When children are released? What are their immediate needs?
  - a. Long term needs?
  - b. What are the educational needs in particular?
  - c. What do they have access to in terms of education? Are they mainstreamed directly? Or do they fall under an SSA or NCLP scheme?
  - d. How does your organization assist in this process?
- 2) What challenges do you find they face when being mainstreamed?
  - a. How does your organization assist?
  - b. To your knowledge do all the children stay in school?
- 3) What challenges do you find they face in maintaining their access to education over the years?
  - a. How do they transition to high-school? And colleges?
- 4) Do parents support children in this regards? How so?
  - a. Are parents also assisted by the NGO/gov. schemes.
- 5) How are they assisted in these regards by your NGO
  - a. To your knowledge, by other NGOS within the field?
  - b. What is the importance of assisting through the years?
  - c. Do you assist in transitions from middle to high school, and from high to college?
- 6) To what extent will their education help their opportunities in gaining stable employment?
  - a. What will be the challenges for them in gaining stable employment?
  - b. What skills are essential for them to have stable employment?
  - c. Do they receive assistance in transitioning into the job market?
- 7) Do you think they should be learn things for more than just employment? If so in what sense?
  - a. Do they learn any life skills?

- i. Which – where?
  - b. Do they learn about their rights??
    - i. Where?
  - c. Do they learn about money management?
- 8) What capacities do you think they need to not fall into bondage or other forms of oppression?
  - a. and to assist those in their community not to fall in to bondage/other forms of oppression?
  - b. Does the education they currently receive assist in this?
    - i. By the gov. public school?
    - ii. By NGO?

## **C. Interview Guide for NGO - “Educationalists”**

### Introduction – Context

- a) Perhaps if you could just describe what your role is within this project?
- 1) When children are released?
  - a. What are their educational needs in particular?
  - b. How does your organization assist in this process?
- 2) What challenges do you find they face when they are mainstreamed?
  - a. How does your organization assist?
  - b. To your knowledge do all the children stay in school?
- 3) What is the general attitude of children with regards to schooling?
  - a. What expectations do they have?
- 4) What challenges do you find they face in maintaining their access to education over the years?
- 5) Do parents support children in this regard? How so?
  - a. Are parents also assisted by the NGO/gov. schemes.
- 6) How does the educational assistance offered by the NGO assist with this?
  - a. What is the importance of assisting through the years?
  - b. Do you assist in transitions from middle to high school, and from high school to college?
- 7) What types of transformation do you see amongst children/youth as they progress? If any?
  - a. Do they develop different life projects, or purposes when they are undergoing education? (in what sense)
  - b. Do they develop different aspirations?
  - c. Do they develop confidence in their potentials?
  - d. Do they develop an understanding of why they were bonded?
- 8) To what extent will the formal education they receive help their opportunities in gaining stable employment?
  - a. What will be the challenges for them in gaining stable employment?
  - b. What skills are essential for them to have stable employment?
  - c. Do they receive assistance in transitioning into the job market?
- 9) Do you think they should be learn things for more than just employment? If so in what sense?
  - a. Does education help?
  - b. Do you offer additional courses, workshops?
- 10) What capacities do you think they need to not fall into bondage or other forms of oppression?

- a. and to assist those in their community not to fall in to bondage/other forms of oppression?
- b. Does the education they currently receive assist in this?
  - i. By the gov. public school?
- c. By NGO?

## **D. Interview Guide for Formerly Bonded/College Students.**

Important Begin with life story –

1. What were they doing before
2. Process to bondage
3. Being in bondage
  - a. What was this experience like?
4. Getting back to school
5. Getting to college

What kind of a life would you like to have? What would you like to do?

How is education making a difference in their lives...

1. How important do you think going to school has been in your life?
2. What difference do you think it is making in your life?
  - a. Why?
3. How do you think going to school can help you have a better life than if you were bonded?
  - a. What do you learn at school or college that can help you have a better life?
4. How do you think going to school can help you from not being a bonded labourer again?
  - a. What other things can it help you avoid?
5. What are things you know that your parents don't know or didn't know-
  - a. About the world, society, laws
    - i. Where did you learn this
6. What are things you are able to do your parents are not or were not able to do?
  - a. Where did you learn this?
7. What other things have you learned that you think is important for your life? For you to be able to do things every day????

Additional Exercise...

Divide this sheet into 2 – make to lists:

- 1) IF I were still bonded
- 2) After going to school..

Take 5 minutes to think... and fill... If you were still bonded.. what would you be able to do.. and what would you not be able to do or know... vs on the other... what you are able to do and what you know...

More specific:

1. What have you learnt at school or college to have a healthy life?
  - a. How do you use this knowledge every day?
2. What have you learnt at school or college that helps you relate with other people outside your village?
3. What have you learnt at school or college that you need for getting a job?
  - a. English? Computer science?
  - b. That will help you look for a job?
4. What have you learnt at school or college that will help you manage your money?
  - a. Have you learnt about saving? Bank? Takin loans? Where did you learn this?
  - b. What will you do when you start to work? With your money?
5. What have you learnt about your society? That you would not know if you were still bonded?
  - a. About India? Tamil Nadu, Your community?
6. What have you learnt about your rights that you would not know?
7. What have you learnt about debt bondage? In school or college?
  - a. How about here at the NGO?
8. Do you do any part time work?

# Annex II: Data Management and Analysis

## A. Example of Data Management by Construct Codes

	Community condition	concepts	Concept
NH1	The people are economically and financially very poor. The higher people they... give less than money and ask to do more work, more night and day, didn't give proper food and water.	vulnerable condition & exploitation (relational position)	dominaiton - relational position
NH1	Those who are high people, the rich people are thinking of those low category scheduled caste, that people are treated like handyman. Given more work and pay less than. Some credit they will give like 10000 rupees but interest is double time. They collect more interest interest but the main amount is their. But they collect only interest. Lifelong they spend time there. Not able to proper education. Not able to conevy food also. They are thinking they are slave. (referring to upper caste). They are put on slave. After that they are beaten, kicking (kicked ).	Caste based treatment and exploitation/slave like condition - Upper caste mentality life entrapment and educational closure	Domination and closure of Education - Relational position
NH1	She belongs to arunthathiyar community. In government record its called scheduled caste that means very poor people, they don't have proper education, proper money also. The rich people can use that. The rich people are thinking; they don't have proper education, and proper drink man. Every day he is on the drink. And he does not have money. He will sell the son and daughter also. So rich people thinking like that. So thinking he is slave.	vulnerability (educational/resource)- exploitable – Rich Community mentality	Domination - relational position
NH1	This is low caste, this is upper cast – upper caste money is there, land is there; rich people, very rich people. So many rich. Upper caste people education is very very good. My caste is very low, no land, no money, no political, no awareness, no education . So now only we give the education. NOw only we give, we give education Step by step we is. After that only come to the equal education to give. That is equal. Education equal. but Marriage not included.	Community position - differntation assets ::: (LOW stigma; physical resoruce, monetary resource, political resource)- lack awareness (condition)- NO education Education - New experience (towards equality)	Relational position/differentiation - Deprivation .. Education-equalizer?
NH1	Marriage not included. Only education is one person our community, is xxxxx officer. That is xxx service. My community officer. That person has received the chair. After relieved that person, another community is come here. That time that person, that chair throw away. That land is cleaned with water. ... Any places go that place is untouchability is there. Are community untouchability is there. We are arandathiyar.	Caste discrimination - independent of educ.	
NH1			